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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

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On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

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As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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Adult (aged 18 and over)	£	36.00
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For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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Celebrating our coasts

Plate 157. Ian Bainbridge WeBS counting on the Fleet Estuary, Dumfries & Galloway, August 2019. © *Carole Bainbridge*

In early August, I spent an evening at Gipsy Point on Dundrennan, setting nets to try to catch Storm Petrels (do they head up the Solway and even cross the country?). When the nets were set, we took time to appreciate the views and the wildlife. Hundreds of migrant Painted Lady butterflies were flying on the clifftops, feeding on Thyme and other flowering plants. An Otter was swimming just offshore, a pod of Harbour Porpoises was out in the bay, and Oystercatchers and Curlews called as the sun set over the Cairnsmore of Fleet - magical!

This is one tiny piece of our amazing 16,000 km of coastline, which has to be one of Scotland's most important habitats, both above and below the waterline. Our seabird colonies are by far the largest in the EU, from St Kilda to the Solway and St Abb's Head. These host large proportions of the world's Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Great Skuas, among other species. Our estuaries are also very important in European terms, with the Forth, Clyde, Tay, Moray Firth and Solway hosting tens of thousands of birds each. Scotland's coastal waters host huge populations of seaducks, grebes and divers. I'm looking forward to reacquainting myself with the Scaup and Common Scoter that occur in Fleet Bay in the winter. The saltmarshes provide vital habitat for our internationally important goose populations, so we have a huge amount to celebrate on our coasts.

How can we celebrate our coasts? The answer is in many ways: use the SOC Where to Watch Birds app to discover parts of the coastline you don't yet know. I'm looking at the North-west Highlands in advance of an autumn trip north. The app has received wide acclaim and is already proving to be a great ambassador for the Club. You can also learn more at the Annual Conference in Pitlochry this November, and the theme for the spring 2019 conference organised by the Moray Branch is on coasts and marine habitats and species, with an emphasis on the Moray Firth.

The summer art exhibition at Waterston House was another celebration of the coast, its landscapes, habitats and wildlife. Ben Woodham's circumnavigation of the shores of the Swedish island of Bornholm in the Baltic over the course of a year was a tour de force. Ben selected a picture a week from over 500 artworks created in the field over the year. The launch was well attended, Ben's explanations of his methods and motivations fascinating, and his book a lovely summary of an ambitious project completed. We were delighted to host the exhibition, and I hope you managed to get to see it.

I'll celebrate again tomorrow; it's the first WeBS count of the autumn, and we're looking forward to seeing which waders have already arrived back on their southwards track; a Whimbrel or two amongst the Curlews perhaps. The data collected also provide superb information to help with the protection of our coastal sites, a vital part of Scotland's natural heritage.

And the Storm Petrels? We've now caught three this autumn, so they're here, but which way do they go? Another of the many mysteries still to be solved.

Ian Bainbridge, SOC President

Plate 158. Deucheran Wind Farm and Carradale Forest, Kintyre, showing pattern of felling and forest restructuring, April 2019. © *David Jardine*

Golden Eagles and forestry in Kintyre - an update

ARGYLL RAPTOR STUDY GROUP

The impact of afforestation on Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* has historically been considered to be twofold; a reduction in the number of breeding pairs through habitat loss and a reduction in breeding productivity. Several studies during the latter part of the 20th century suggested that increasing forest cover in south-west Scotland led to a decline in the number of breeding pairs (Marquiss *et al.* 1985, Whitfield *et al.* 2001, Watson 2010). Breeding productivity was also noted to decline with increasing areas of afforestation (Marquiss *et al.* 1985, Whitfield *et al.* 2007). However, the Golden Eagle Conservation Framework (Whitfield *et al.* 2008), did not identify commercial afforestation as a marked constraint on populations.

This paper describes briefly the changes in upland Kintyre since Watson (2010) and provides an update on the current status of the Golden Eagle population in Kintyre.

Historical changes in Golden Eagles in Kintyre

Jeff Watson (2010), in his monograph, describes changes in the population of Golden Eagles in Kintyre (the Watsonian vice-county south of the Crinan Canal). The historical information on occupation was relatively complete as far back as the early 1960s because of the diligent fieldwork of Mike Gregory and Sandy Gordon. Watson notes that prior to 1950, less than 5% of the land above 200 m in altitude in Kintyre was covered by woodland, but by the 1980s this had increased to over 60%. Mike Gregory and Sandy Gordon had found at least eight pairs and perhaps as many as ten pairs of Golden Eagles nesting there in the 1960s. This had dropped to four pairs in 1995; believed to be a consequence of the blanket spruce afforestation which had taken place. Gregory (2007) indicated that at least three of these pairs vacated territories by 1980.

Recent changes in upland Kintyre

Forest changes - National Forests and Land

The total area of the National Forests and Land (south of the Crinan Canal) is around 30,750 ha, of which 21,750 ha is under now woodland cover (including felled areas). Since 1995 there has been no new planting carried out by Forestry and Land Scotland (or their predecessor the Forestry Commission); as such the area of forest cover in publicly-owned forests has not expanded.

A number of significant changes have taken place in the National Forests and Land in Kintyre since 1995. The first of these was the Boxing Day storm of 1998, which swept through southern Kintyre blowing down around 400 ha of woodland in Dalbuie Forest (1,930 ha). The damage further north in the peninsula was less extreme, but the salvage of this timber led to the restructuring of the forest creating a more varied habitat than the widescale even-aged conifer plantations present in 1995.

The development of harvesting resources and a 'route to market' for the forests of Kintyre as a consequence of the storm led to the expansion of forest road networks and restructuring plans for most of the older public forests in Kintyre. As felling programmes progressed the areas were replanted; details of the replanting areas provide estimates of the felling areas and open young forest areas:

Replanting date	Area (ha)	% of current forest area
1994–98	662	3.0
1999–2003	1,823	8.4
2004–08	1,677	7.7
2009–13	1,431	6.6
2014–18	1,150	5.3

During this period forestry policies also changed, which has resulted in conifer planting being kept back from watercourses and more internal open space being provided within forests during the replanting operation (Forestry Commission 2017). However, the tree species composition of these forests has not changed significantly largely because of the very small area of ancient woodland sites in these forests and the nature of the upland soils in these forests which favours the growth of Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis* and few other commercially viable trees.

Forest changes - Private Woodlands

Most private woodland development in Kintyre took place after that established by the Forestry Commission and these forests are generally younger. Further private planting took place within the Kintyre area since the 1995 survey through a variety of planting schemes (Forestry Commission data):

Planting Scheme	Period	Area (ha)
Woodland Grant Scheme	1995–2005	1,145.5
Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme	2005–07	179.9
Rural Development Contract	2009–13	324.6
Forestry Grant Scheme	2017–18	34.6
Total new planting since 1995		2,684.6

The overall impact of these changes has meant that the extent and structure of forests in Kintyre has changed from a large-scale blanket in 1995 to a patchwork of forests of greater extent which contain a variety of forest habitats and greater open space (provided by keeping planting back from stream-sides and off areas of deep peat) in recent years.

Changes for renewable energy

In response to government policy on renewable energy a number of wind farms have been built in Kintyre. As mitigation for some of the wind farms an agreement between land-owners and the wind farm operators led to the development of the Central Kintyre Habitat Management Plan in 1999. This plan set out to:

- increase the area of open moorland available for foraging eagles by 450 ha
- reduce the levels of live prey at the wind farm development area
- actively manage 960 ha to increase the number of Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*

When enacted this plan led to the removal of 272 ha of woodland cover (net area), much of which was Sitka Spruce which was growing poorly/checked at high altitude, which with associated internal open spaces within the previous forest provided 450 ha of open moorland. This woodland removal was concentrated in one geographical area around an occupied territory. While providing benefit to that pair, the impact of this woodland removal (c. 1% of the total woodland cover in Kintyre) on the wider Golden Eagle population is likely to have been marginal compared with the impact of other changes in upland Kintyre.

Since 1995, a total of six wind farms have now been built in Kintyre with a total of 113 turbines (Plate 158). Another four which are consented are approaching construction and a further two are in the planning process. While the first wind farms constructed included woodland removal in their design, more recent and proposed wind farms are using a 'key-hole design' and involve compensatory planting for any woodland removed as a consequence of the development. This compensatory planting is not confined to Kintyre.

Plate 159. View from newly occupied Golden Eagle eyrie, Kintyre, June 2017. © *Andrew Ford*

Agricultural changes
There have been significant changes in agriculture in Kintyre since 1995, largely resulting from the introduction of the single farm payment. In the upland areas this has resulted in livestock being removed from some of the land and overall a reduction in the stocking. Between 1995 and 2018, the number of sheep in Kintyre (south of the Crinan Canal) has declined by 43% and the number of beef cattle by 15% (per Scottish Government Rural & Environmental Science & Analytical Services).

Golden Eagles in Kintyre - the recent situation

Number of territories occupied
The 2007–11 Atlas confirmed breeding of Golden Eagles was found in six 10-km squares in Kintyre, and possible breeding in a further five 10-km squares (Balmer *et al.* 2013). During the National Golden Eagle Survey in 2015, single pairs were reported in eight 10-km squares in Kintyre (Hayhow *et al.* 2017).

During the period 2014–18, a total of 11 different territories, where nesting has been initiated in at least one year, have been found in Kintyre by the Argyll Raptor Study Group (and others), including two newly occupied sites in 2017 and 2018 respectively (Plate 159). In five of these territories, the eyrie is situated within a forest environment (in trees, or open spaces largely surrounded by trees) and in seven forestry is a significant land use in the territory, although none are totally afforested.

Nest sites
All of the known nesting sites are crag nests, except one situated in a Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* tree.

Breeding productivity
We have some information on the breeding success to fledging from ten of these territories. For five territories the breeding success is known of all breeding attempts during the period 2014–18. These territories reared 0.60 young per breeding attempt. Overall productivity for the area during this period was 0.58 young per breeding attempt monitored (n=31).

Prey
Detailed observations on the prey of Golden Eagle in Kintyre in recent years are limited and biased to a small number of sites where monitoring has been more complete. At the best studied site Red Grouse was the predominant prey item in one successful season, but two years later it was rabbit. At another site Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* was the principal prey species found at the nest, suggesting a shift to hunting of prey more associated with a forest environment.

Discussion

This note does not set out to provide a detailed study of the impacts of afforestation and other land-use change, rather it seeks to report that the population decline in Golden Eagles which was attributed to blanket afforestation is now being reversed. This has happened during a period when the area of forest has increased slightly, but perhaps more importantly, during a period when significant restructuring of the upland 'blanket' forests has taken place. Evidence from recent satellite tracking studies has indicated that Golden Eagles use restructured forests more than previously understood and it is to be hoped that detailed findings from such work will be published soon.

Alongside these forest changes has been a significant reduction in the number of grazing livestock in Kintyre. It is not known whether changes in agriculture may have led to a reduction in previously unrecorded (covert) persecution.

Despite fears about the impact of windfarms on Golden Eagles (Gregory 2010), to date this has not seen any impact at a population level in Kintyre where the eagle population has increased alongside an increasing number of turbines. The overall area occupied by these turbines is small and to date

they appear to have been well sited in respect of eagles, being situated away from nesting areas and areas where eagles have been observed frequently during pre-construction studies.

The productivity of the Golden Eagles in Kintyre during this period (0.58 young per monitored nest) is within the range of the national average productivity for Golden Eagles, which during 2014–2017 varied between 0.3–0.67 young / monitored nest annually (SRMS Reports).

Acknowledgements

This paper resulted from the collaborative effort by members of the Argyll Raptor Study Group (ARSG). Mike Gregory and Roger Broad long co-ordinated the monitoring of Golden Eagles in mainland Argyll, tracking changes during the years of afforestation for over 40 years. Additional information was provided for some sites by K. Graham, McArthur Green and Natural Research (Projects) Ltd.

David Jardine produced the initial text for this note and John Taylor, Blair Urquhart and Dave Walker commented usefully on drafts. Daniel Hayhow of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds organised the 2015 National Survey, providing some support to our local effort. SNH and the BTO issued licenses to ARSG members for the purpose of population monitoring.

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Amendments to the *Scottish List*: species and subspecies

THE SCOTTISH BIRDS RECORDS COMMITTEE

In 1993, the Council of The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) delegated to the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) responsibility for producing a *Scottish List* and publishing regular amendments. The list was first published in 1994 and SBRC appointed a Subcommittee to maintain it; the current members are Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and Roger Riddington.

SBRC established several principles for the original version of the *Scottish List*, which are still followed. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has maintained the official British List since 1883 and SBRC adopts its taxonomy, sequence, scientific and English names, and species categorization for the *Scottish List*.

The BOU Records Committee (BOURC) normally only adjudicates on the first British record for any bird taxon. Responsibility then lies with the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) for acceptance of all subsequent records of rare species and subspecies in Britain. Similarly, SBRC is responsible for acceptance of records of species and subspecies which fall outside the remit of BBRC, but which remain rare in a Scottish context. Decisions by BOURC, BBRC and SBRC automatically apply to the *Scottish List*.

The *Scottish List* was most recently published in full in 2011, with annual updates from 2013 to 2018 (cited in Forrester 2018). Since then, there have been three publications that affect the *Scottish List*. BOURC has published its 49th Reports (BOU 2018), whilst BBRC (Holt *et al.* 2018) and SBRC (McInerny & McGowan 2019) have produced annual reports covering 2017.

The current updated version of the *Scottish List* in Excel format can be found on the SOC website at: www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/the-scottish-list/

BOURC decision that affects the *Scottish List*

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

2017 Orkney Garso, North Ronaldsay, 2cy+ female, 29 April to 14 May, photo (S J Davies *et al.*) (*Ibis* 160: 936; *British Birds* 111: 618, plate 406; *Scottish Birds* 37: 357–359, plates 303–305).
Add to *Scottish List* Category A. Subspecies undetermined. Status code V. Place after Baltimore Oriole.

BBRC decisions which affect the *Scottish List* (Holt *et al.* 2018)

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*

2017 Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda 2cy male found 'not freshly' dead, 26 March, photo, DNA analysis (J Pilkington *et al.*), wings and skeleton at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh (accession number NMS.Z 2017.116 (*British Birds* 111: 568; *Scottish Birds* 37: 279–283, plates 222–225).
Add to *Scottish List* Category A. Monotypic. Status code V. Place after Sora Rail.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

2017 Fair Isle Ditfield and Johnny's Peats, 4cy+, 2 March, photo (D Parnaby *et al.*) (*British Birds* 111: 579, plate 374; *Scottish Birds* 37: 274–275, photos 215–217).
Add to *Scottish List* Category A. Monotypic. Status code V. Place after Great Black-backed Gull.

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus*

2017 North-east Scotland Longhaven, 2cy+, 2 July, photo (P D Bloor, P S Crockett, D Gill) (*British Birds* 111: 588; *Scottish Birds* 37: 368–370, plates 314–315).

Add to *Scottish List* Category A. Subspecies undetermined. Status code V. Place after Pallid Swift.

SBRC *Scottish List* subcommittee corrections

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

It has been incorrectly shown on *Scottish List* as *M. f. fusca*, when it is monotypic.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

It has been incorrectly shown on the *Scottish List* as monotypic when there are four species, with nominate *L. c. canus* occurring in Scotland.

Scottish List category totals

As a result of the above changes the *Scottish List*, category totals are now:

Category A	524
Category B	6
Category C	9
Total	**539**
Category D	10

The *Scottish List* - on the SOC website

Due to the frequency of changes to the *Scottish List*, it is considered inappropriate to produce regular printed versions that quickly become out of date. The *Scottish List* does however appear on the SOC website, in a convenient Excel format, where it is updated annually and can be 'downloaded'. It is found at: www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/the-scottish-list/

Records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions

Comprehensive lists of all records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions now appear on the SOC website in tabulated form (www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/scottish-birds-records-committee-sbrc/records-of-species-and-subspecies-recorded-in-scotland-on-up-to-20-occasions). The lists are updated annually.

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Unpublished information in the SOC Archive on Snowy Owl diet at three locations in Moray in the 1960s

J. SAVORY

The late Sid Roberts (1915–2008) was a Customs and Excise Officer at Benrinnes distillery in Aberlour in the 1960s and was also a keen ornithologist and photographer. He took a particular interest in monitoring a few migrant Snowy Owls *Bubo scandiacus* that resided for varying periods at three locations in Moray in 1964, 1965 and 1966. Those years coincided with frequent Snowy Owl sightings in Shetland. Some of his work was done in collaboration with SOC member Doug Weir (who was then a research assistant responsible to the RSPB's Conservation Committee) and he sent his records annually to the SOC's Rarities Committee via Andrew Macmillan. In October 2016, a selection of Sid's bird material, including his Snowy Owl data, was kindly donated by his son Mike Roberts and duly entered in the SOC Archive.

Sid's detailed Snowy Owl records in the Archive (Box NB327) are in two black loose-leaf notebooks. They include information on diet from analyses of a total of 205 regurgitated pellets collected at the three locations in different years. As this number is much greater than the sample sizes of pellets in previous published reports of Snowy Owl diet (Marquiss & Cunningham 1980, Marquiss et al. 1989, Miles & Money 2008, Marquiss *et al.* 2016), and as it allows a comparison between locations, these results are presented in this article. The locations where pellets were collected and where Snowy Owls were observed are as follows:

Knockando

This was an area of mainly sloping open moorland (now partly afforested) called Elchies Forest surrounded by hills, which is 3–6 km north of Knockando Distillery and close to where Sid lived and worked. He refers to it as 'Moray Basin'. His notebooks describe frequent visits there to locate and observe two adult Snowy Owls (thought to be male and female) from November 1964 to March 1965, one adult (thought to be male) from August to October 1965, one adult and one immature (thought to be males) from January to March 1966, and one adult (sex not specified) from August to October 1966. An earlier Snowy Owl sighting in this area was reported in January 1964 in addition to several more going back to the 1940s. Doug Weir subsequently informed Sid that one was shot by a keeper on this estate in 1966 because it was killing grouse.

Cabrach

This was an area of sloping moorland (also now partly afforested) surrounding Mount of Haddoch, which is 3–4 km north east of Cabrach and on the boundary between Moray and Aberdeenshire. Sid observed one immature Snowy Owl there on three days in February 1965 and there was a previous reported sighting there in 1961.

Ben Macdui

Sid's sightings (and one by Doug Weir) of Snowy Owls were all on the rocky plateau extending north from the summit of Ben Macdui towards Cairn Lochan. The sightings there were of one bird in June 1964, one adult male on several dates in June and August 1965, one adult female in

August 1965, and one immature bird in June 1966. Previous sightings of an adult Snowy Owl in the same location in the summers of 1952, 1953 and 1963 were reported by Gribble (1964).

The numbers of regurgitated Snowy Owl pellets collected by Sid (and a few by Doug Weir) at roosts and perching places at the three locations in different months and years are shown in Table 1. It should be pointed out that not all of these were fresh, and some were collected on visits to the sites several months after the last owl was seen.

Table 1. Numbers of pellets collected at three locations in different months and years.

Location	Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Knockando	1964											6	14	20
	1965		18	6					5	32	11			72
	1966	10	2	3					11	8	22	8		64
Cabrach	1965		1	2	4									7
	1966		1	8										9
Ben Macdui	1965						9	4	12		6			31
	1966						2							2

All 205 pellets collected (including those that were not fresh) were examined and the prey remains they contained were identified. Doug Weir examined the pellets collected at Knockando in 1964 and Sid did all the rest. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2 as the numbers of pellets in which remains of different prey items were identified. It should be pointed out that some pellets contained remains of more than one prey item. The Snowy Owls' prey items listed in Table 2 can be grouped broadly as lagomorphs, small mammals, gamebirds, waders, passerines, and beetles. Total proportions of mammalian and avian prey remains differed greatly between the three locations. Respectively, they were 65% and 34% (and 1% beetles) at Knockando, 45% and 55% at Cabrach, and 19% and 77% (and 4% beetles) at Ben Macdui.

Table 2. Numbers of pellets in which remains of different prey items were identified.

	1964	1965	1966	Total	%
Knockando (number of pellets collected)	(20)	(72)	(64)		
Adult hare (mainly Mountain Hare)	7	26	5	38	20.9
Leveret or Rabbit	9	34	30	73	40.1
Short-tailed Field Vole (one probable Bank Vole)	1	3	2	6	3.3
Mouse (probable House Mouse)		1		1	0.5
Mole		1		1	0.5
Partridge		1	3	4	2.2
Red Grouse	10	13	25	48	26.4
Wader (probably Golden Plover)		1		1	0.5
Medium-sized passerine (mainly Fieldfare)		2	2	4	2.2
Small passerine (Skylark, Wheatear or Meadow Pipit)		4		4	2.2
Beetle		2		2	1.1
Cabrach (number of pellets collected)		(7)	(9)		
Adult hare (probable Mountain Hare)		2	2	4	20
Leveret or Rabbit			3	3	15
Short-tailed Field Vole		1		1	5
Common Shrew		1		1	5
Red Grouse		5	3	8	40
Wader (possibly Golden Plover)			2	2	10
Small passerine (Snow Bunting)			1	1	5
Ben Macdui (number of pellets collected)		(31)	(2)		
Mountain Hare leveret		3	1	4	8.5
Short-tailed Field Vole		5		5	10.6
Ptarmigan (including nine chicks)		32	2	34	72.3
Wader (probably Dotterel)		1		1	2.1
Small passerine (possible Meadow Pipit)		1		1	2.1
Beetle (one possibly an earwig)		2		2	4.3

Doug Weir never published any report of his involvement in Sid Roberts' Snowy Owl studies, or his analyses of the pellets collected in the Knockando area in 1964. However, in their book *The Cairngorms: their natural history and scenery* (p. 143), Nethersole-Thompson & Watson (1974) cite a personal communication from Doug that "Snowy Owls have wintered and summered for some years on a moor in lower Speyside, feeding mainly on Mountain Hares and Red Grouse". Surely this must refer to his work with Sid near Knockando.

The results in Table 2 confirm that Snowy Owls are opportunistic feeders capable of capturing and eating a wide variety of prey items ranging in size from hares, Rabbits and gamebirds to smaller mammals and birds and even invertebrates. Such variety in diet presumably reflects local variation in availability of the different prey species. Elsewhere, Snowy Owls in Shetland fed mainly on Rabbits and seabirds (Tulloch 1968), except when Rabbits were decimated temporarily by myxomatosis (Robinson & Becker 1986); those in the Arctic feed mainly on lemmings (Watson 1957), and in central Iceland (where they breed in a rodent-free area) they live mainly on Ptarmigan (Watson 1966). Ptarmigan and their chicks were also by far the most important prey items on Ben Macdui plateau in the summers of 1965 and 1966 (Table 2), and they represented a majority of prey there in 1980, 1987 and 2013/14 (Marquiss *et al.* 2016). Watson (1966) concluded that Snowy Owl sightings on Ben Macdui occurred in years of Ptarmigan abundance and not in low Ptarmigan years 1956–58. Finally, in addition to its dependence on location, year and season, variation in Snowy Owl diet may also reflect differences in hunting strategies and skills of individual owls.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mike Roberts for donating his father's Snowy Owl material to the SOC Archive and Mick Marquiss for his interest and comments on these historical data.

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Plate 160. Sparrowhawk hunting Snipe at Seafield, Annan, Dumfries & Galloway, 26 October 2018. © *Clive Griffiths*

Sparrowhawk hunting Snipe from the ground

On 26 October 2018, I was birdwatching at Seafield near Annan, Dumfirs & Galloway with a friend when we spied a small roost of waders including 98 Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* - a good count for this area of the Solway. In front of the roost were 3–4 Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* feeding. As we walked back towards the car, more Snipe took flight. In total, 28 Snipe took off from the small patch of marsh while the other waders remained. Back at the car, a female Sparrowhawk flew in, flushing the roost and landing where the Snipe had been. After around two minutes the hawk started running around on the short turf. It covered all the turf on one side of a ditch and then flew a few feet onto another area of turf and continued to run around. Watching from the car I suspected that this bird was trying to catch 'frozen' Snipe, as Snipe use this technique to hide from predators. No Snipe flew or were caught by the Sparrowhawk. After around four minutes, the bird flew in front of the car and carried on its search for food.

This behaviour was not noted by Ian Newton in his book *The Sparrowhawk* but in correspondence he replied: "I have seen a Sparrowhawk run along the ground after a small bird that dived into ground cover, so your note about Snipe doesn't surprise me. However, I don't know how common this behaviour is, and I think it would be worth writing it up, at least as a short letter for publication. If your colleague saw this Sparrowhawk hunting in this way regularly, that of course makes the observations even more valuable".

Though this was the first time the behaviour was observed, it seemed that the bird may have learned this technique beforehand and that it was employed when very high tides concentrated birds in the roost area.

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Red Kite observed drinking

It is well documented that raptors rarely drink and obtain most of their necessary water through their food (e.g. Phillips *et al.* 1985). However, I observed an individual Red Kite *Milvus milvus* drinking on two occasions in Galloway while watching reintroduced kites at Woodhall Loch near Laurieston, Dumfries & Galloway. At 16:39 hrs on 12 March 2004, an adult Red Kite, identified by its wing tags as a bird in its fourth calendar year, landed by the edge of the loch and waded out to a depth of a few centimetres. It then took one mouthful of water before flying off. At around 15:30 hrs on 4 April 2004, the same kite landed in the same place on the loch shore. This time the bird took three mouthfuls of water before flying off and joining a second bird, probably its mate.

It is not clear if this behaviour is under-recorded in Red Kites and other raptors or if there was another factor involved. Raptors, including the closely related Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (e.g. Fisher *et al.* 1972), have been recorded drinking in hot climates. However, the weather was not especially warm on either date, with a strong cold wind and snow flurries on 12 March. There were some warm spells on 4 April but also sleet showers.

Raptors in a state of ill-health have been observed to drink water, sometimes excessively (Cooper 1985). However, there was no evidence of any ill-health in this individual. This bird, a male, survived until at least 2011 and fathered young in most years although its nest did fail in 2004 after being blown out by a storm (RSPB Scotland 2004, 2011). It has been shown that Red Kites can carry sub-lethal doses of toxins, including legal rodenticides (Newberry *et al.* 2003) that could potentially compromise a bird's health. There was, of course no way of knowing if this was the case with this individual.

Acknowledgements

I was employed by RSPB Scotland on the Red Kite reintroduction project in Dumfries and Galloway. Scottish Natural Heritage also partly funded this work. Glyn Young assisted in the literature search for references to raptor drinking behaviour.

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Adam Watson (1930–2019)

Adam Watson, arguably the most productive Scottish ecologist and environmentalist of the last century, died aged 88 on 24 January 2019. His immense contribution to field-based ornithology in Scotland was acclaimed internationally, as much for his research findings as for the way he worked in the field.

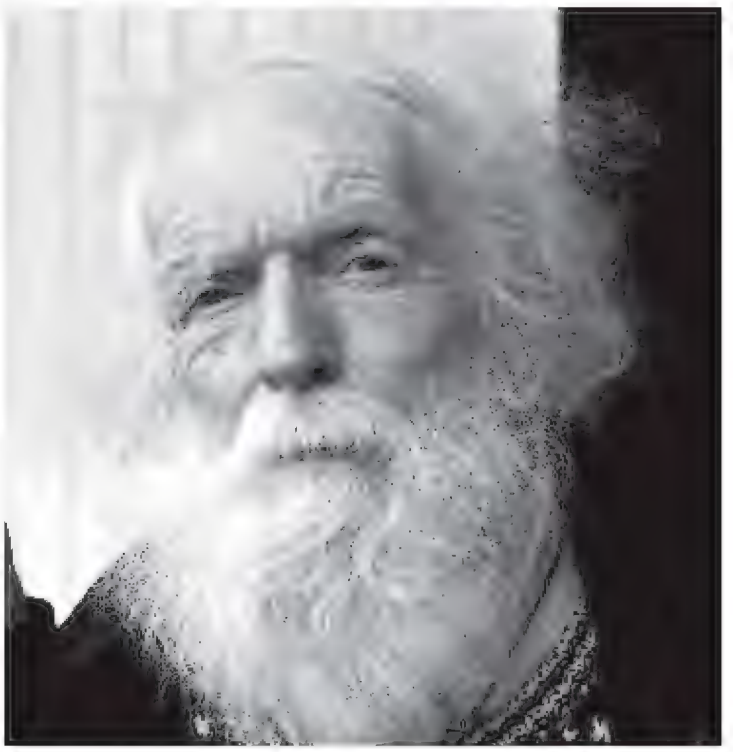

Plate 161. Adam Watson. © *Pete Moore*

Born on 14 April 1930 in Turriff, Aberdeenshire, Adam was forever grounded to his roots, but emerged as the maestro of arduous field natural history. A polymath, he was a first-class life scientist, prodigious writer and editor, accomplished ski mountaineer and expert on Gaelic place names and the North-east's history, geography and weather. Studying mountain birds, mammals, soils, vegetation and snow patches, Adam developed uniquely special datasets on long-term changes.

Gaining a first-class honours degree in zoology at the University of Aberdeen in 1952 and, winning the MacGillivray Prize, he went on to take a PhD there on 'The Annual Cycle of Rock Ptarmigan' in 1956. Adam emerged as an exceptionally determined and skilled field ecologist. His Honours dissertation project on the winter ecology of Ptarmigan involved frequent long bus trips and ten mile hikes in often atrocious weather, and would be viewed today as impossibly ambitious and dangerous!

Following an adventurous expedition to Baffin Island, which whetted his appetite for the Canadian Arctic, Adam joined the Nature Conservancy Unit of Grouse and Moorland Ecology in 1956 to study population changes in Red Grouse in North-east Scotland. Research ensued to try and understand how parasites and other factors drove grouse cycles. What emerged was a complex range of factors driving the cycles, including the amount of young heather, underlying geology, and management practices. Working later for the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology now the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), the research on grouse became world-renowned. The Collins New Naturalist book *Grouse* (2008), written by Adam and long-term colleague Robert Moss, provides the detailed findings of their and others' studies. Working in some of the toughest environments imaginable, Adam's research on the elusive Ptarmigan, arguably the world's hardiest bird, involved bivouacs in harsh conditions during which he recorded numbers, breeding success and habitat use by individuals. Obsessively observing these birds, he worked painstakingly across a series of study areas giving us data vital in revealing the impacts of climate and land use changes on nature. Each day, often consecutively over weeks, and spanning seven decades, Adam worked on Scotland's highest mountains and, sometimes with pointer dogs, surveyed the summit plateaux and boulder fields for every nesting bird in order to develop an accurate population estimate.

By the 1970s, Adam had written what are now classic papers on Ptarmigan behaviour and ecology. He was also by then an established scientific critic and editor of the highest standards. The textbook *Animal Populations in Relation to Their Food Resources* (1970), edited by Adam, with a Preface by David Lack, was transformative when published in stimulating new studies and helping consolidate what went on to become key long-term studies. V.C. Wynne-Edwards, mentor to Adam, wrote a highly insightful final chapter in the book,

'Feedback from food resources to population regulation'. Referring to habitat appraisals by grouse and Beavers, he ended with the words: "Beyond this I am not prepared to speculate." This amused Adam, who often wryly remarked that Wynne made his career out of speculation! Adam and Wynne forged a close and important working relationship over three decades, and Wynne encouraged Adam to develop studies of mountain birds and their habitats, with ensuing papers published on nesting waders and Snow Buntings, and on mammals, vegetation and soils.

The Cairngorms. Their Natural History and Scenery (1974; revised and updated in 1981), authored with Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, is a classic textbook and for its time was far ahead of any other regional account of natural history in the UK. In fact, the book was to have been co-written with Wynne and Derek Ratcliffe, but the team proved dysfunctional. Wynne was too busy to contribute chapters, though had been especially keen to write on the geology, climate and variability of snow, but ended up writing the Preface. Derek's draft of the vegetation chapter is beautifully written but Adam had the temerity to condense it, resulting in the pair barely speaking for five years, with Desmond at the time telling Adam and Derek that they were "impossibly difficult to work with." The correspondence between the four revealed exceptionally sharp minds determined to do justice to this most remarkable part of the world - but in very different ways! Ironically, it was Adam's father, a solicitor, who retired to support his son's fieldwork, who acted as the great peacemaker between the four, and to him and Seton Gordon the book is dedicated.

Plate 162. Adam Watson with puppy pointer dog Henry viewing a nesting Ptarmigan. © *Stuart Rae*

Interests in Adam's early life were key to his later development. Aged seven, he developed a fascination for snow, and encouraged by the naturalist Seton Gordon, Adam took notes on the occurrence of mountain snow patches. By the age of 14, he was keeping a diary of snow events, which developed in the 1940s to systematic monitoring of long-lasting snow patches in the Cairngorms, which remarkably continues to this day in collaboration with Iain Cameron. To date they have produced 23 annual reports on the survival of Scottish snow patches, for the Royal Meteorological Society, providing a unique record of weather related influences on snow lie - an excellent signal of climate change.

An outstanding mountaineer, climber and cross-country skier (the first person to ski-tour the six tops of the Cairngorms in a day, in 1962), Adam climbed and checked most of the cliff routes in the Scottish Mountaineering Club's climbers' guide, *The Cairngorms*. He revised this popular book in 1968, completely re-wrote it in 1975, and repeatedly updated further editions.

His activism in nature conservation was sparked by several threats. The prospect of a major skiing development planned for the Lurcher's Gully in the Northern Corries of the Cairngorms in the early 1980s galvanised his painstaking study of human related disturbance of mountain soils, vegetation and birds. The unstinting persecution of birds of prey on grouse moors, some of which he studied for decades, infuriated him. He developed the longest running study of Golden Eagles in Europe, providing an unrivalled historical record of the fate of territories, with some suffering from interference each year since the

1940s. He worked tirelessly against raptor persecution and led the establishment of Scotland's first Raptor Study Group, in the north-east. He gave freely of his expertise to those supporting the conservation of birds of prey, other species and vulnerable habitats. Over the decades he worked on grouse moors, Adam developed close and respectful friendships with many of the keepers. His relationship with the redoubtable Bob Scott, head stalker of Mar Lodge, was special, and Bob, from his base at Luibeg, ensured Adam had ready access to the eagle country that became his domain.

Adam's studies were by no means confined to the uplands. He devised a remarkable study of long-term changes in populations of Corn Buntings in North-east Scotland (collaborating with RSPB staff) and other farmland birds. He became intensely interested and expert in soil erosion and damage in native woods, and this became his final obsession as student and teacher.

A natural communicator, his North-east Scots burr, beautifully enunciated regularly on TV and radio, concealed a scholarly and unique mastery of Deeside Gaelic, which was to the fore in his magisterial textbook *The Place Names of Upper Deeside* (1984). Adam often spoke fondly of "Being there", and in fact this revealed a fascination in landmarks and features which each had a local name. Through talking endlessly with local people, and self-taught in Gaelic, Adam developed an unrivalled and encyclopaedic knowledge of the cultural roots of the Cairngorms' landscape. This area of scholarship alone was highly significant and innovative.

He retired in 1990, but continued to work as an Emeritus CEH Fellow. His scientific output was prolific, publishing more than 30 books and 500 plus other scientific publications. Just months before he died, Adam published his last paper (with Jeremy Wilson) in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* in autumn 2018, detailing a seven decades study of Mountain Hare population changes in North-east Scotland.

Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Royal Society of Biology and Royal Meteorological Society, lauded widely including receiving the John Muir Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award, 2005, and the RSPB's President's Award, Adam held four doctorates. His portrait is in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. In his later years, he published many 'print on demand' books which captured his lifetime's experience in subjects as diverse as Scotland's mammals, Scottish mountain snow patches, hill walking and climbing, expeditions to the Arctic and using trained dogs for biological research. He brought his field notebooks to life with these books, contrasting the birds and habitats of North-east Scotland 50 years ago with the present day. How many other ornithologists would ensure their lifetime's work was captured and archived for posterity in this way? The fate for many field note books is destruction or loss, but the long runs of field ecological and environmental data, many included in these books, will prove to be one of Adam's greatest legacies, and offer great scope for further research.

Scholarly, authoritative, forthright, energetic and compellingly obsessive in his methodological approach, Adam inspired a cult following among mountaineers and environmentalists. As a scientific critic he was merciless, and was unsparing in his criticism of traditional land managers, scientific competitors, and indeed friends, firing off forensically argued epistles at will. A scourge of what he termed 'establishment' thinking and practices, Adam was vehemently condemnatory of anyone who did not conform to his understanding of nature. Loyal and unstintingly supportive to his friends, and utterly pure in his philosophy that nature should not be trumped by development, Adam was a beacon for many in the nature conservation movement. He was a giant in the realm of Scottish ornithology, and a leading member of an exceptional cadre of late 20th century naturalists. His wide-ranging expertise and penetrating thinking are irreplaceable, and we feel his loss deeply as a friend, collaborator and sharp critic.

Adam is survived by daughter Jenny, son Adam, and two granddaughters. His brother, Stewart, and wife, Jenny, predeceased him.

Ian Francis, Rab Rae and Des Thompson

Plate 163. The SOC stand at the Caithness Show, Wick, Caithness, July 2019. © *Nina O'Hanlon*

SOC at the Caithness County Show

N. O'HANLON

On 29 July 2019, Caithness Birds SOC group had a stand for the first time at the annual Caithness County Show, this year in Wick, held by the Caithness Agricultural Society.

Plate 164. The SOC stand at the Caithness Show, Wick, Caithness, July 2019. © *Nina O'Hanlon*

After an early morning start to get the gazebo up, we were all set to chat about birds in Caithness and promote the great line up of autumn talks. Thanks to the rain, it was a bit of a slow start, however, by midday the sun came out and so did the people. It was great to chat to everyone who came to the stand, discussing everything from where to watch birds locally to plastic and raptor persecution. The SOC Where to Watch Birds app came in very useful, especially for people visiting on holiday.

To engage younger visitors to the show, we dissected a couple of local Barn Owl pellets, which were full of exciting skulls of voles and a tiny Pygmy Shrew. We had a couple of incredibly enthusiastic youngsters come and chat to us, which was fantastic - and hopefully we'll see them again at future meetings! It was also great to chat to those on surrounding stands, especially the Forestry Commission who invited us to contribute to the consultation on the land management plan for Caithness.

As well as highlighting the amazing birdlife of Caithness, we were keen to draw attention to the decline in the wintering numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese in the county. To try to identify all the locations they use for foraging and roosting, we are asking local birders, farmers, visitors and anyone else in the region to keep an eye out for these birds around Caithness. If you are reading this and are travelling through Caithness this winter, keep an eye out and let our country recorder, Sinclair Manson, know if you see any. His contact details are on the inside back cover.

A massive thanks to everyone who volunteered on the stand over the day, and those that came to say hi! Plus, a special thanks to Jane Allison for producing the excellent leaflet* to promote the group and working the logistics so we had plenty of SOC material on the stand! After a thoroughly enjoyable day, we are already looking forward to attending next year's Caithness Show in Thurso, and making it a regular event in our calendar.

Nina O'Hanlon, Castletown, Thurso.
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Plate 165. The SOC stand at the Caithness Show, Wick, Caithness, July 2019. © *Nina O'Hanlon*

**If your branch plans to attend local events and would like HQ to produce a flyer promoting your activities, please get in touch with Jane to arrange!*

Plate 166. The SOC stand at the Caithness Show, Wick, Caithness, July 2019. © *Nina O'Hanlon*

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Ayrshire: Miss R. Marshall, **Borders:** Mr A. Dawson, Ms L. McLeish, Mrs J. Nayak, **Central Scotland:** Mr & Mrs H. Arbuthnott, Ms L. Haire, Mr C. Mackay, Dr H. Tooby, **Clyde:** Mrs M. Hughes, Mr K. Keenan, Mr A. Pinch, Mr A. Walker, **Dumfries:** Mr K. McBride, Ms H. Stevenson, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr G. Allison, Mr K. Argo, Mr B. Evans Freke, Mr K. Kingscott, Mr D. Read, Mr A. Rycroft, **Fife:** Mrs G. Piche-Paterson, Mr & Mrs A. Wallis, **Highland:** Mr A. Cluxton, Mr L. Reeve, Ms S. Ross Steven, Mr & Mrs P. Sage, Mr J. Wilkinson, **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs D. Ball, Mr L. Beyer, Mr S. Black & Ms A. Dobel, Ms L. Dettmer, Mrs A. Eddison, Mr A. Fleming, Miss C. Foord, Prof & Mrs J. Ford, Mr & Mrs M. Forrest, Mr & Mrs R. Hunt, Mr M. Loudon, Mr C. MacLellan, Mrs P. Metcalfe, Ms F. & Miss N. Rait, Mr S. Renton, Miss A. Welch, Mr & Mrs M. Wood, **Moray:** Mr R. Smith, **North-East Scotland:** Mr G. Davidson, Mrs S. Johnson, Ms S. van Houten, **Orkney:** Mr M. Lever, **Scotland - no branch:** Miss F. Hurley, Mrs S. Wallis.

SOC Annual Conference and AGM

22–24 November 2019, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. For more information and to book, visit www.the-soc.org.uk.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

21 March 2020, Elgin Town Hall. Programme and booking information will be enclosed with the December issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Staff changes

Farewell to Susan

It is with much sadness that we bid farewell to Susan Horne at the end of July. Susan had been the Club's librarian for the past two years, previously having volunteered in the library for four years and having served on the library committee. Thanks to her excellent organisation skills and attention to detail, Susan has made some very positive enhancements to the library office space, making it a much more user-friendly environment for staff and volunteers alike. Among her more recent achievements while in post was securing the SOC's inclusion in the National Library of Scotland's Sound Archives digitisation project. After a successful application, Susan worked with library volunteer, Ian Elfick, over several months to collate the Club's many sound recordings and the material was collected by NLS in early July.

Welcome to Rosie

Details of the Librarian vacancy were circulated to local members in June and we received a number of very good applications. We are delighted to announce that the strongest candidate, Rosie Filipiak, accepted the offer of the job and took up post in August. Rosie lives in nearby Dunbar and has just retired from ten years as Undergraduate Manager with Edinburgh University. She brings a solid background in administration of processes and procedures, software systems, managing staff and prioritising a varied workload. Rosie is a member of the Club and as well as being an active birdwatcher, she has a special interest in natural history books and has her own sizeable collection of titles. Rosie works one day a week (the day may vary) and can be emailed at library@the-soc.org.uk

Plate 167. Rosie Filipiak, July 2019. © *Kathryn Cox*

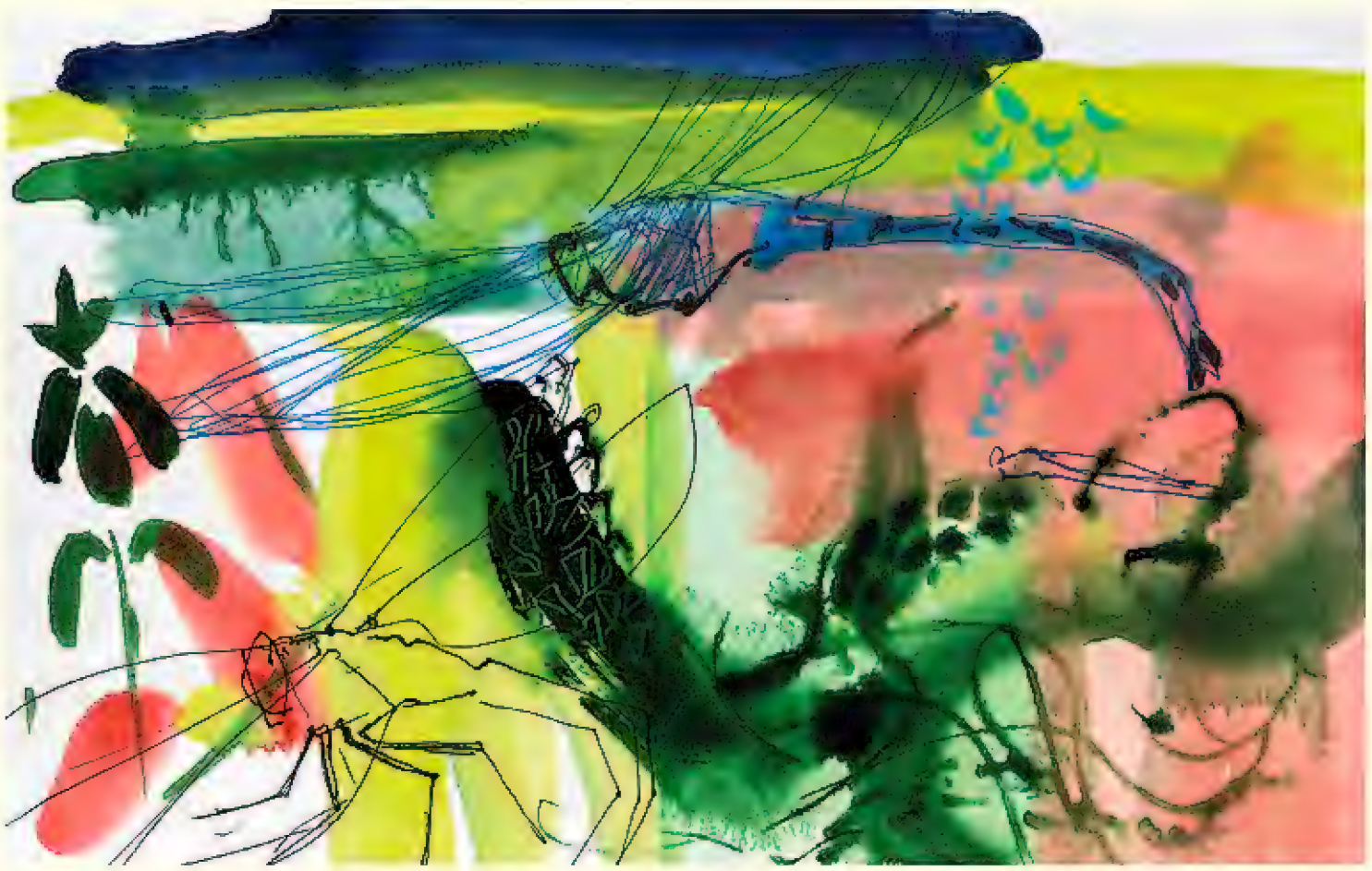


Plate 168. Emperor Dragonfly by Nik Pollard.

Waterston House

Art exhibitions

Interpretations, 31 August to 9 October - This exhibition of sculpture, drawings and paintings brings together the work of Helen Denerley, Nik Pollard, Lara Scouller and the late Greg Poole. Their work shares a desire to discover, interpret and question. They find answers through dedicated study, exploring and experimenting with materials. Through the process of making, and their knowledge of the subject, they are able to distil, simplify, and make bold decisions whilst remaining true to nature. The results are dynamic, expressive, celebratory impressions of our natural world.

Contrast, 12 October to 19 November - This group exhibition by Max Angus, Paul Bartlett, John Foker and John Hatton highlights contrasting approaches to the subject of wildlife. Paul Bartlett's and John Foker's work draws attention to the construction of their images. In these, the subject seems to fleetingly emerge from the background, always at risk of being reabsorbed by it. By contrast, Max Angus and John Hatton, both printmakers, favour pared-down compositions and muted colours to create images full of serenity and stillness.

Plate 169. Whimbrel by Helen Denerley.

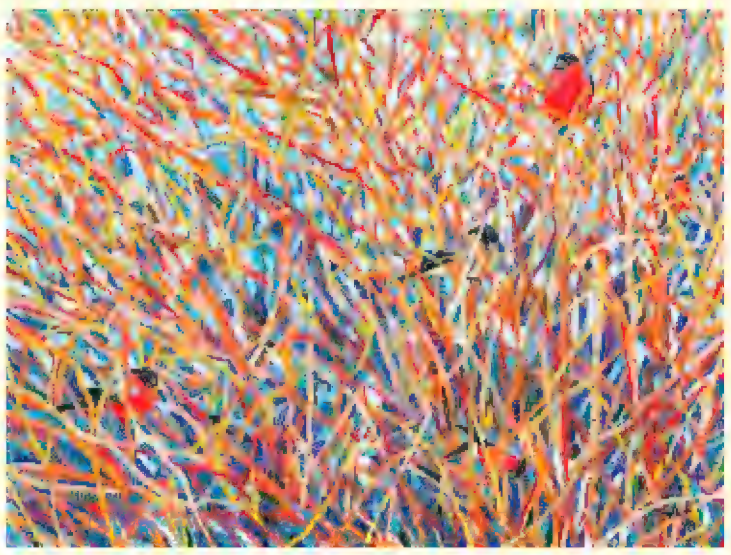


Plate 170. Bullfinch Thicket by Paul Bartlett.

Plate 171. Guillemot gathering by John Hatton.

Advance notice - Darren Woodhead's solo exhibition, 22 November to 15 January 2020, more information in the next issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Optics demo day

Saturday 21 September, 10:00 hrs–16:00 hrs, Free Event. Looking for your first pair of binoculars? Or thinking of an upgrade? Come along to our annual spring optics day to try out a wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free, friendly expert advice. If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know in advance and we will do our best to have these available for you to try at the event. Call the office on 01875 871330 or email birdingofficer@the-soc.org.uk

Goose watch events

Illustrated talk: Thursday 26 September & Tuesday 1 October, 17:30 hrs, £10 (SOC members £8)

Guided walk: Saturday 28 September, 06:45 hrs Learn about the migrating geese that descend on the country each autumn. The illustrated talk will be given by Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve warden, John Harrison (East Lothian Council) and will be followed by a chance to watch the birds fly in to roost on the bay. Meanwhile, the early morning walk provides an opportunity to view the geese leave the roost site to go out and feed in the surrounding farmland. Price for the talk or walk is £10 (£8 SOC members), which includes refreshments. Places are limited so advance booking essential. For more information and to book, visit www.the-soc.org.uk/support-us/events/events or call the office on 01875 871330

Branch updates

Caithness Secretary: Nina O'Hanlon, 5 Churchill Road, Castletown, Thurso KW14 8UW, tel 07810 300392, Email: caithnesssecretary@the-soc.org.uk

Council thanks the outgoing Chairs for their many years of dedication to their respective branches. Ayrshire - Brian Lennox replaces Pat Gibbs; Borders - Martin Moncrieff replaces David Parkinson; Highland - Carol Miller replaces David Bain. For full branch committee updates, visit the 'Local Branches' page of SOC website www.the-soc.org.uk

Local Recorder moves on

After six years as Local Recorder for North-east Scotland, (paid!) work has taken Nick Littlewood to Cambridge and he has relinquished the Recorder's post. Nick brought a high level of professionalism to the job and, although he will be back in the area regularly, he will be greatly missed as a skilled broad-spectrum naturalist in North-east Scotland. He was presented with a token of appreciation by the North-East Scotland Branch after his talk (on ladybirds) at the March Recorders' meeting organised by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre, which Nick formerly managed. Nick is succeeded as Local Recorder by Ian Broadbent (see inside back cover for contact information), who we wish well in the role.

Reducing single-use plastic at HQ

As well as having switched back from plastic film to paper envelopes for the delivery of the Club mailings, for the past few months we have been trialling alternatives to the Lakeland plastic sandwich bags (not widely/easily recycled) that we were using to sell bird food in the shop at Waterston House. We first tried compostable food caddy liners, which proved to be slightly too fragile, so we are now trying Kraft paper bags, secured with compostable labels supplied by Vegware.

We are also looking into alternatives to our popular fleeces, given the concerns over microfibres that such plastic garments release into the water system via our washing machines. In the meantime, you might wish to consider purchasing a Guppyfriend™ laundry bag (available on the internet for around £30), designed to catch the microfibres.

Plate 172. Nick Littlewood (right) with Alan Knox (North-East Scotland Branch Chair), March 2019.

Plate 173. Leith Docks from the air. © *2018 Google*

The Leith Docks Common Tern colony

J.C. DAVIES

The Common Tern colony in Leith Docks, Lothian, has been abandoned for the second year running, with no chicks fledged. Established in the 1970s on an artificial island - the remains of the old lock system at the entrance to the Imperial Dock (Plate 173) - the colony grew steadily over the years to 995 pairs in 2017 (plus 8 pairs on the jetty by Ocean Terminal) (Figure 1). It then became the largest colony of this amber-listed tern in Scotland and the third largest in Britain and Ireland. The colony has been monitored by members of the Lothian Ringing Group (LRG) since 1986 and was declared a Special Protection Area (SPA) in 2004. The high-level designation by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) was specifically in response to the threat of disturbance caused by crane and vessel operations adjacent to the tern colony. It is the duty of the Government (i.e. SNH) to safeguard such sites.

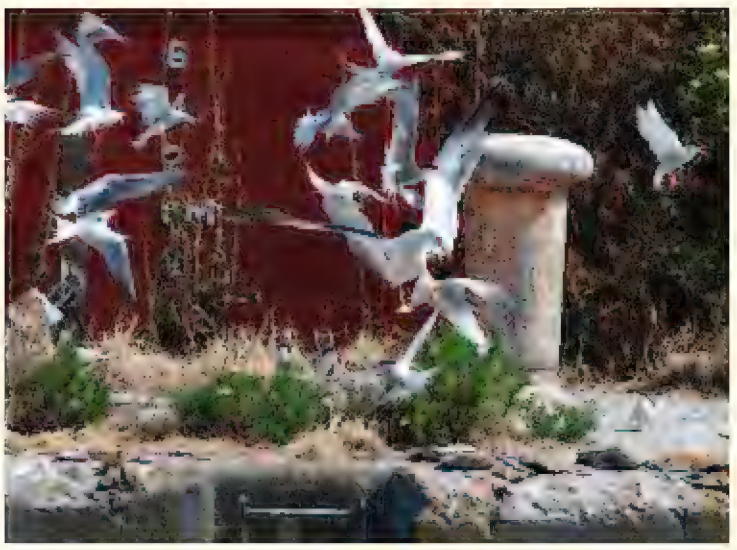


Plate 174. Lesser Black-backed Gull entering the Common Tern colony, Leith Docks, 28 June 2018. The *FS Pegasus* is moored behind the 'island'. With increased disturbance of the colony, such attacks become more prevalent. © *Ian Andrews*

In 2018, the colony halved in size to 514 pairs due to disturbance caused by a supply vessel laid up in the 'cut' between the 'tern island' and the dockside and the ship breaking activities on the adjacent dockside and dry dock. This year, 2019, the colony was halved again - to 246 pairs - due to further disturbance caused by North Sea oil pipes being loaded by overhanging gantry cranes onto supply vessels and a cargo vessel moored in the 'cut'. The first of these pipe contracts occurred while the terns were arriving in early June and settling down to nest and the second contract when the first chicks were hatching in late June. The colony was abandoned soon afterwards.

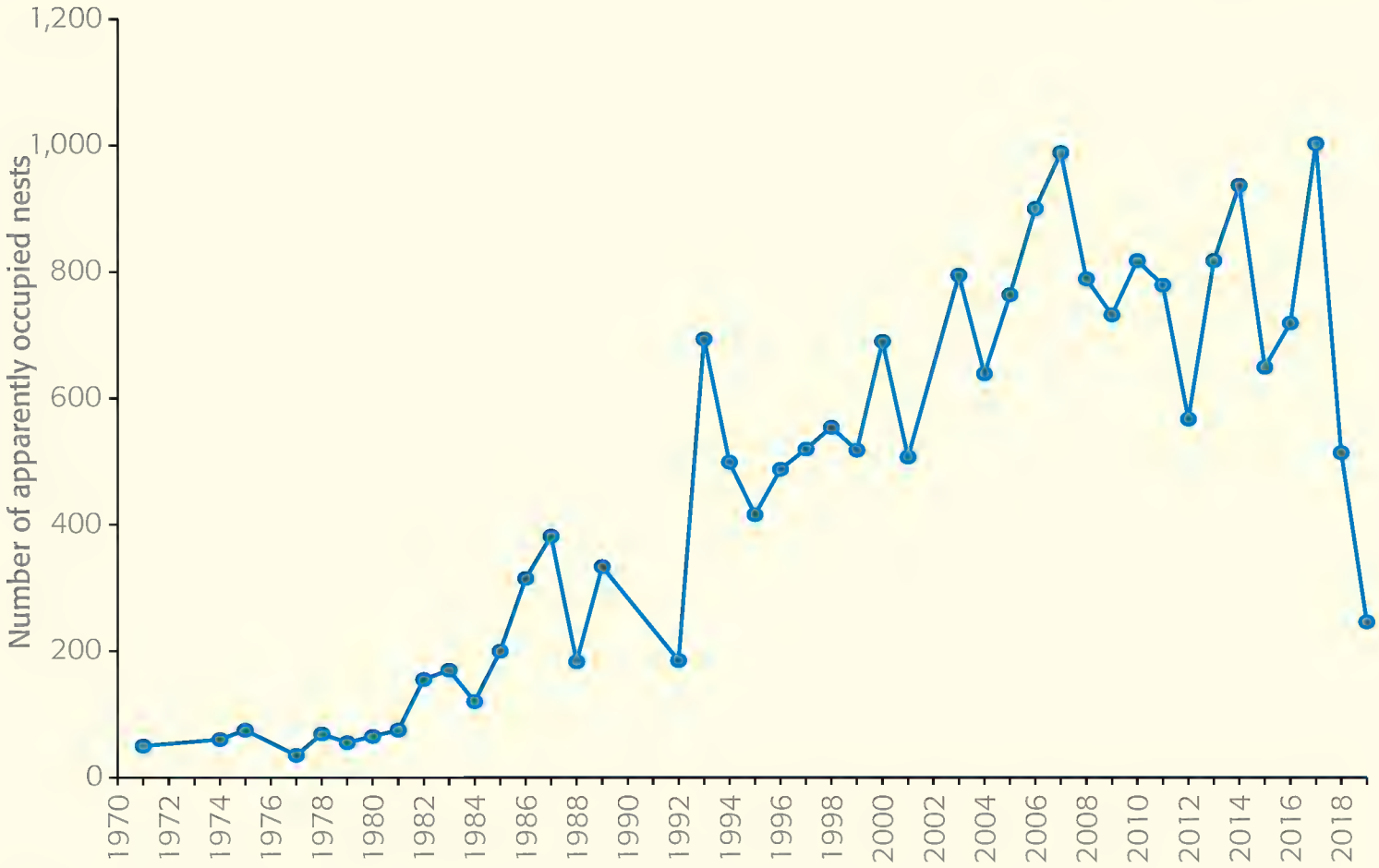


Figure 1. Numbers of Common Terns nesting at Leith Docks, Lothian, 1971–2019 (source: Lothian Recorder's files and LRG since 1986).

Forth Ports (FP), Leith Docks' owners, claimed there was no disturbance by port operations in 2018 (Plate 174). This year, FP again claimed port operations in the close proximity of the colony (Plate 175) were not the cause of the abandonment, but instead suggested that it was a mink attack. SNH agreed with FP over the cause of the abandonment saying that there were "clear signs a predator such as a mink had attacked the birds and their eggs" and that it "requires balancing the continued operation of a busy commercial port with the conservation of the birds". LRG found no evidence of a mink or any other 'attack'. During the 33 years of monitoring the colony, even moderate failure has only been noted on two previous occasions - once when the colony was 'hosed down' by the crew of a vessel berthed in the 'cut' and, even when mink killed and stashed 50 birds in c.2004, the colony went on to fledge many young.

Newspaper articles in *The Times* and *The Scotsman* have drawn attention to the problem. In the former, Chris Packham heavily criticised SNH for failing to find a compromise management strategy that could satisfy humans and enable the birds to prosper. With no young reared for two years at this SPA, and a specific cause attributed by FP/SNH, the success of any action taken by SNH to prevent a repeat in 2020 is eagerly anticipated. However, without any agreement on the real causes of the problem, the future of Scotland's largest Common Tern colony is in jeopardy.

Plate 175. The Common Tern colony, Leith Docks, 14 June 2019. Two vessels including *FS Arendal* are moored behind the 'island'. © *Ian Andrews*

John C. Davies, Lothian Ringing Group.
Email: johncdavies@blueyonder.co.uk

South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre gathering

J. HOWIE

Long-standing member of the Stewartry Branch, Mark Pollitt, who is manager of the South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre, invited his branch to man a stand on behalf of the Club at his 2019 gathering in Dumfries on 30 March 2019.

He has been manager since this records centre started 15 years ago and held his last gathering 10 years ago when it was then known as the Dumfries and Galloway Environmental Resources Centre. The name change came about when Ayrshire was included and up to 29 March the records held numbered as many as 1,837,125.

The first talk was given by the well-known member of the Dumfries Branch, Brian Smith, on the history of bird ringing in Dumfries and Galloway. The North Solway Ringing Group, founded in 1963, is the oldest group in Scotland and also the first to use canon-netting. Over these many years the group's activities have included the ringing of Pied Flycatchers at the 130 nest boxes in Carstramon Wood near Gatehouse of Fleet, ringing at Loch Rutton, which proved that Reed Warblers were nesting in the region and the ringing of 17,000 pulli Sand Martins at Bobby Smith's artificial sand bank built in 1994 at Applegarthtown, between Lochmaben and Lockerbie. Canon-netting is carried out at Annan Waterfoot where waders stop to feed up on their way north to breed and on their way south to their wintering grounds.

Ellen Wilson, RSPB, gave an update on the 2018 review of the Biological Recording Infrastructure in Scotland which made 24 recommendations to deliver five outcomes. We cannot understand and protect our natural world for future generations without monitoring and reporting on the state of the environment and for this we need adequate resources to support organisations and volunteers in collecting, managing and growing our trove of environmental data. Interestingly, the first ever request for records was in 1902 when the Reverend Hugh McPherson in Cumbria realised their importance.

The update on the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project to reintroduce this bird to the area was given by Philip Munro who said that only one male and two female chicks had been collected in 2018. It had been hoped every year of the project to collect ten chicks aged from 5 to 8 weeks old, which would only be taken from nests where there were twin chicks. These birds will be satellite-tagged (these last for 6 to 10 years) and monitored. The belief is that southern Scotland can support between 14 and 16 pairs of Golden Eagles in the future.

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels was discussed by Sarah Cooper, SWT, who said these had been in the UK since the Ice Age and that the invasive Greys had been introduced in the late 1800s. The estimated population of the Reds in the UK is 125,000 (with 75% of these being in Scotland), with the Greys numbering over three million. The Reds now face predators (which include cats), road deaths, fragmentation and loss of habitat as well as squirrel pox passed on from the Greys. Unfortunately, more and more Greys are being reported in Dumfries and Galloway.

Galloway Fisheries Trust's Courtney Rowland spoke about the Sparling, one of our rarest fish, now known from just three river systems in Scotland. Despite once being common in the mouths of many rivers along Scotland's Solway coast it has suffered a significant decline over the last 100 years and is now thought only to survive in the Cree. This fish has a peculiar smell of cucumber. Commercial fishing ended in the early 1980s - no longer was there the spectacle of the "river boiling" with Sparling. It is being

studied to understand its life cycle, the threats it faces and opportunities for reintroduction.

Other talks covered the monitoring of moths and plants in Dumfries and Galloway (both require more volunteers to help with surveys), the restoration of peat bogs and the ongoing work of SNH's Peatland Action project, the Northern Brown Argus butterfly, a special species in the region with a restricted range due to the distribution of its food plant, the Common Rock Rose and the monitoring of non-native species at Stranraer marina and Portpatrick harbour.

David Hawker, who has been botanical recorder for Kirkcudbrightshire since 1998, and a member of the Stewartry Branch for well over 30 years, gave the last talk of the day. His area is the old vice-county which extends from the River Nith in the east to the River Cree in the west and consists of 39 10-km squares. Plants used to be recorded just in these squares, so that even when there was only one specimen of a particular plant, it looked as if it was abundant in the whole square. Today, with modern technology, the exact spot where a plant is present can be recorded with pin-point accuracy. This will enable any change in expansion and contraction to be seen.

There were 140 attendees at this successful, varied and interesting conference.

Joan Howie, The Wilderness, High Street, New Galloway, Castle Douglas DG7 3RL.
Email: joanospreys1@btinternet.com

Sparrowhawk feeder

S. KEITH

After reading the article "A successful killing technique" in the March 2019 Scottish Birds, *Sandra Keith has been in touch to describe the more normal hunting style of her local Sparrowhawk.*

On 4 April 2018, a group of Goldfinches were feeding from various niger and sunflower open-based seed feeders in my Gullane garden, Lothian (Plate 176). While I watched, a Sparrowhawk flew in, halted on the feeder, stretched a claw in through the wires, grabbed the Goldfinch and flew with it into the next-door garden where it perched on a large tree stump to eat. The incident took possibly four seconds. Took me much longer to get over the incident! As a Sparrowhawk is a frequent visitor, I felt I had created a feeding station for it, so dismantled the domed seed feeders. I am now trying to put together a makeshift wired feeder with a much larger diameter so that the feeding birds are outwith the stretch of its claw. It would be interesting to know how many times this hold-and-grab technique has been observed.

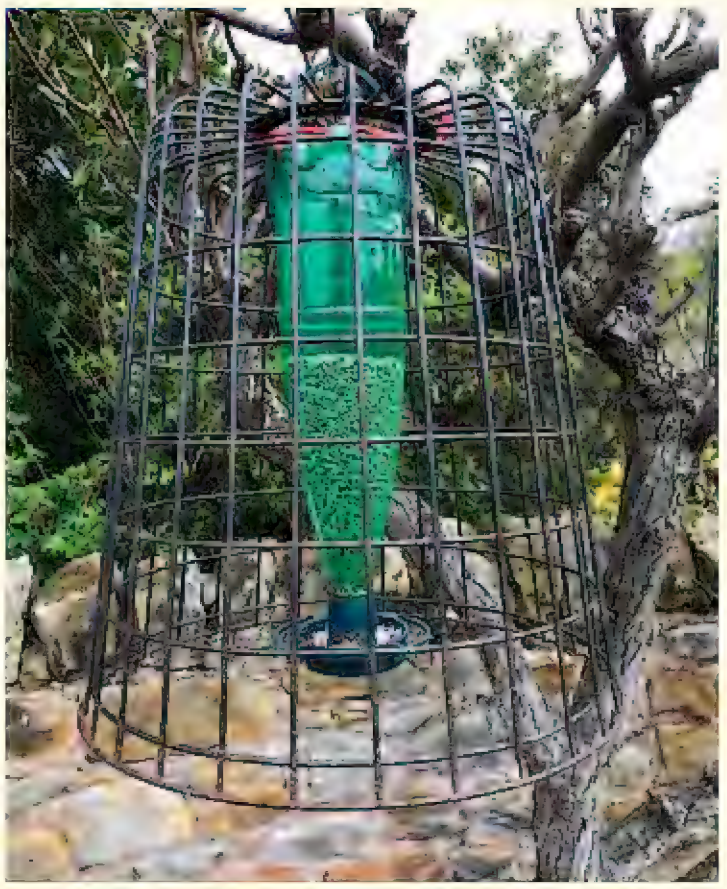


Plate 176. The feeder, Gullane, Lothian, April 2019. © *Sandra Keith*

Sandra Keith, Gullane, Lothian.
Email: sandrak2@mac.com

A Peregrine painting by J.G. Millais and its connections with Lodge, Gould and Wolf

J. SAVORY

Plate 177. The original painting of Peregrines and Pintails by J.G. Millais.

In December 2017, the Astor Collection of wildlife art and other items from Tillypronie in Aberdeenshire were sold in 407 lots at a Christie's sale in London. The two artists whose sporting paintings represented a majority of the artworks were Archibald Thorburn (1860–1935) and George Lodge (1860–1954). Most of the Thorburns sold for much more than £10,000 (one of a covey of Red Grouse even fetching £200,000), whereas only two of the Lodges reached that figure. In a separate online sale were 108 of the lots that were deemed to be less valuable. Among these was a striking watercolour painting by John Guille Millais (1865–1931) of two Peregrines, one (the main subject) holding down a struggling drake Pintail and the other plucking a dead duck Pintail (Plate 177). Much to my surprise and delight, I managed to buy it for less than £1000.

The reason I was so pleased to get this painting is because when I was doing research for my book on Lodge (*George Lodge: Artist Naturalist*) that was published by Croom Helm in 1986, the Tryon Gallery in London, who gave me much help, provided me with a photograph of a wood-engraved version of this same composition (Plate 178), drawn by J.G. Millais (see "JGM" lower left) and engraved (*sculpsit*) by George Edward Lodge (see "GEL. Sc." lower right). Lodge became an apprentice wood engraver when aged 16 and subsequently produced countless illustrations for books and articles (mainly about birds) before that laborious process was superseded by more modern printing methods after about 1900. His exquisite engraving of (boxwood) woodblocks, as can be seen in Plate 178, required the use of a magnifier in his right eye and he lost the sight of that eye in his final years.

Plate 178. The wood engraving plate of Peregrines and Pintails, engraved by G.E. Lodge, in *The Natural History of British Surface-Feeding Ducks* by J.G. Millais.

I knew that "Johnny" Millais was a close friend of both Lodge and Thorburn, who were godfathers to his son Raoul and with whom he shared many interests, but was unaware of the significance of this (Plate 178) and other photographed illustrations I obtained from the Tryon where Millais was the artist and Lodge the engraver. My purchase of the original painting of Peregrines and Pintails, however, prompted further research and I found that Millais used the engraved version of it to show predation on Pintail in his impressive and lavishly illustrated book *The Natural History of British Surface-Feeding Ducks* (Plate 179) which was published by Longmans in 1902 and can be seen in the SOC's George Waterston Library. Its 72 plates comprise coloured paintings by Millais and Thorburn (some dated 1900 or 1901), coloured photographs of differing plumages, photogravures and other black and white illustrations by Millais, and five wood engravings where Millais was the artist and Lodge the engraver. In addition to the one of Peregrines and Pintails (Plate 178), the other four are of a Peregrine striking a Teal in flight (to show predation on Teal), a Gyrfalcon sitting on a boulder covered in plucked feathers in a seabird colony (used incongruously as a "finis"), and two illustrating ducks and other birds (but no predators) in lakeside habitat. Ten species of dabbling duck are described in the book and each is represented by several plates.

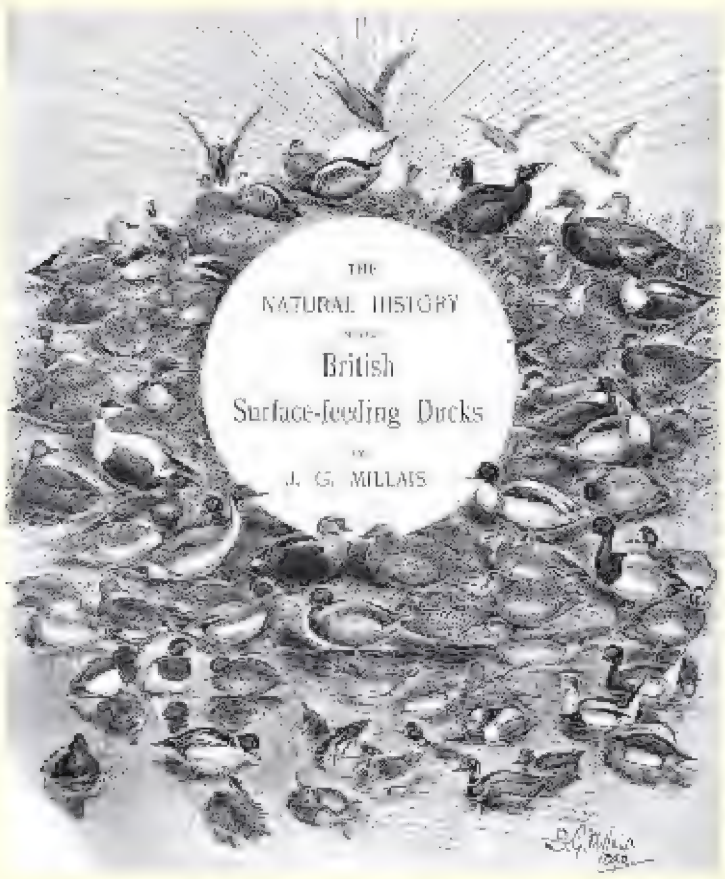


Plate 179. The illustrated title page in *The Natural History of British Surface-Feeding Ducks* by J.G. Millais.

My painting has the same "JGM" monogram in exactly the same lower left position as in the wood-engraved version but, significantly, it is also signed "J G Millais 1886" in the lower right. This date raises some interesting questions. What inspired Millais to paint this accomplished composition in 1886 when he was 21 years old, and long before he used it in his *The Natural History of British Surface-Feeding Ducks*? As can be seen from his Wikipedia entry, this industrious, multi-talented and widely-travelled man had already written five books before that one was published in 1902. Four of these were to do with his favourite pastime, which was hunting and shooting various types of game (and birds he shot and skinned as a boy were the basis of a lifetime collection of some 3,000 specimens), and the other was a biography of his father who was the famous Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais (1829–96). So, when did he start preparing his 1902 book on ducks (his composite image in Plate 179 is dated 1892) and when did Lodge do the engraved version of my painting that he used in it? Presumably that was also when he added his "JGM" monogram to the painting to show its position in the engraving, and when it was decided to add a third Peregrine (in flight and carrying another Pintail drake) to the engraved version (see Plate 178). And why did Millais choose to use for his book three of his compositions engraved by Lodge where the main subject is clearly not a duck, but predation by a falcon (on Pintail and Teal and one of a Gyrfalcon in a seabird colony with no duck at all), when ducks are the main subject in all other plates? Could it be that these three engraved compositions were originally intended for another book about falcons, but Millais dropped that idea and used them instead for his duck book?

I am convinced the 21-year-old Millais got his inspiration for my painting from two plates in Volume 1 (Birds of Prey) of John Gould's *Birds of Great Britain*, a magnificent work published in five volumes from 1862 to 1873 and described as "the most sumptuous and costly

Plate 180. The Peregrine Falcon plate, painted by J. Wolf, in Volume 1 of J. Gould's *Birds of Great Britain*.

Plate 181. The Greenland Gyrfalcon plate, painted by J. Wolf, in Volume 1 of J. Gould's *Birds of Great Britain*.

of British bird books". The two plates concerned show the Peregrine Falcon (Plate 180), which Millais surely copied for the main subject in my painting, and the dark-phased Greenland Gyrfalcon (Plate 181), where the rear bird plucking a Mallard is surely the model for the rear bird plucking a Pintail in my painting. In the history of ornithological illustration, Gould (1804–81) is second only in importance to Audubon and, unlike Audubon, his publication of a succession of bird monographs brought him considerable wealth. Not long before his death in 1881, the young Millais and his father were taken by Reginald Cholmondely, a natural history specimen collector with a private zoo, to visit him at his London home. Gould was lying on a couch suffering from gout, but was much impressed by the schoolboy's correct identification of a rare Bird of Paradise specimen. On the way home, the Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais expressed his intention to paint the domestic scene and stuffed birds around Gould's couch he had just witnessed. He eventually did so after Gould's death, using models, and the resulting painting "*The Ruling Passion*" (Plate 182) was praised by the critic John Ruskin at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1885. The scene depicted may have been partly imagined, however, because Gould never remarried after his wife Elizabeth died in 1841, his daughters were present but his sons were not (according to J.G. Millais's account of the visit), and he had only one grandchild.

Plate 182. An ailing John Gould with family and stuffed birds as depicted in "*The Ruling Passion*" painting by J.E. Millais.

Although Gould was rightly famed as ornithologist, publisher and organiser, he employed other artists for the production of the lithographic plates in his bird monographs. The best of these was Joseph Wolf (1820–99) and it was he who painted the Peregrine and the Greenland Gyrfalcons in Plates 180 and 181 (his name and those of H.C. Richter and W. Hart who, respectively, did the lithographic work for these two plates are shown bottom left in very small print). Wolf was a German artist who came to live in London in 1848. He specialised in natural history illustration and Sir Edwin Landseer thought him "without exception, the best all-round animal artist who ever lived". He was the mentor who encouraged, inspired and had a huge influence on Lodge, Thorburn and Millais, and they all made copies of certain of his works (see Plates 183 and 184 for a copy by Lodge). They were similarly inspired by their contemporary, the great Swedish wildlife artist Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939).

If we assume that my painting (Plate 177) does indeed represent some copying by Millais from Wolf's Peregrine and Gyrfalcon illustrations (Plates 180 and 181), we are still left with two questions: why Pintail and why so much emphasis on the struggling drake? Regarding the first, Millais would have known that predation by a falcon on Mallard was a common theme of Wolf's, as seen in Plates 180, 181 and 183 and also elsewhere. So maybe he simply wanted to put his own stamp on his painting by including a duck species not depicted by Wolf, and chose Pintail as the most appropriate one. With regard to the second question, maybe he wanted to add drama to his composition, and this large drake with the intricacies of its plumage allowed him to further demonstrate his artistic skill while also introducing more coloration. Maybe he even envisaged a future use for the painting in wood-engraved form. Finally, does that drake's neck in my painting seem too long? While its depiction may not be wholly convincing, Pintails do indeed have necks that are longer than those of other dabbling ducks. They are stretched during courtship and presumably enable reaching food in deeper water, and in my painting the bird is clearly stretching its neck in its attempt to peck at the Peregrine.

Plate 184. G.E. Lodge's painting of a (dark phase) Greenland Gyrfalcon with a Mallard that was copied from that by J. Wolf in Plate 183.

Plate 183. J. Wolf's painting of a (white) Greenland Gyrfalcon with a Mallard that was copied by G.E. Lodge.

John Savory, West Linton, Peeblesshire.
Email: jandesavory@hotmail.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Tentsmuir: ten thousand years of environmental history. R.M.M. Crawford, 2019. Archaeopress, Oxford, ISBN 978-1-78969-124-5, softback, 192 pages, £24.99.

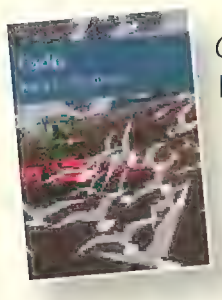
This is a very impressive account of this north-eastern peninsula of Fife, which sits between the rivers Tay and Eden, and is remarkable for being one of the largest wind-blown sand and dune habitats in Scotland.

In ten chapters, the text explores a wide range of topics, detailing positive and negative aspects of environmental changes, and is generously accompanied by many interesting photographs and illustrations. As the author states in his last paragraph "Tentsmuir is not a static environment that should be forced to conform to any human perception of what is natural or normal. Tentsmuir continues to survive by adapting itself to a changing world."

This is an extremely thorough review of the changes to Tentsmuir through time, and the wildlife and plantlife which occurs there. A great book; well worth seeking out.

Stuart L. Rivers

Gulls: New Naturalist 139. John C. Coulson, 2019. William Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-820142-5, hardback, 478 pages, £65.00.



Gulls is one of the latest New Naturalists on a popular, but sometimes also unpopular, group of birds, by one of the UK's most experienced gull experts. The author's aim is "bringing together and digesting information on the gull species that occur in Britain and Ireland". He does this well. It is written by a top scientist, but it is not overly scientific and is written in an easily readable style. Each British gull species has its own chapter covering the usual sections; distribution, movements, food and so on. But, there are also idiosyncratic anecdotes based on a lifetime of gull research which liven up the text; how Common Gulls were superabundant on the Tyne before the sewage discharge into the river was cleaned up, but almost never use landfill sites; how Kittiwakes colonised Newcastle; how Herring Gulls were spectacularly culled on the Isle of May in the 1970s; how we probably have the wrong idea of Herring Gull population trends because we don't count urban nesters. There is a chapter devoted to the rarer gull species and another to the methods we use to study gulls. The final two chapters are the most interesting to my mind. One is on urban gulls and the second on conservation, management and exploitation of gulls.

John Coulson has pioneered a lot of our current appreciation of gulls in urban environments and I wish his chapter on them was required reading for anyone who has an issue with gulls. Urban gulls are a complicated example of human-wildlife conflict (or perhaps more appropriately, human-human conflict between those of us that like them and those that do not). We need some imaginative and balanced solutions, increased awareness and tolerance, and an end to the notion of 'seagulls' as a stereotype bogeyman increasingly plaguing our towns and cities. As this book demonstrates, there is a whole lot more to British gulls. It helps us to appreciate their diversity, their fantastic natural history and their admirable resilience in doing well in a human world where so many other species are struggling. Buy this book and learn to love gulls again, or revisit your infatuation.

Will Cresswell

RSPB Guide to Birdsong. Adrian Thomas, 2019. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-5587-6, paperback, 256 pages, £15.99.

This book aims to demystify the dark art of identifying birds by the sounds they make, and without doubt, it succeeds. Its three sections - an introduction to bird songs and calls, a guide to 'common UK bird' sounds, and a reference guide employ many ways of presenting the relevant information, making for an enjoyable reading and learning process throughout.

The whole book has value, but the reference guide will have most appeal to a more experienced birder. The sonograms shown for each species are clear and have phonetic renderings incorporated. This allows the reader to combine the structure of the sound (i.e. the frequency, duration and pace) with the written description, giving a much more realistic interpretation than could be achieved from a standard phonetic rendering. This, in combination with the recordings on the included CD, innovative use of text (e.g. the rising and falling text describing Chiffchaff calls), and easy to understand discussions of tricky pairs (e.g. Blackcap and Garden Warbler) are the book's strongest elements.

Although aimed at those beginning to learn bird sounds, there is plenty here for the more advanced birder. At £15.99, *Collins Guide* aside, I'm not sure there is a better value bird book on the market.

Mark Lewis

RINGERS' ROUNDUP

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, wee stories, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at: rduncan393@outlook.com. Thank you very much to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round up. Thanks also to the many bird watchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them.

For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to: www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports

Found it! Oystercatcher 'N87' - a mystery solved by Aberdeen ringer, Alistair Duncan

On 22 June 2007, we ringed an Oystercatcher chick on the roof of the Queen Mother Library at Aberdeen University. As well as the standard BTO metal ring, we also fitted it with a white plastic colour ring bearing the black inscription 'N87'. This bird has subsequently been resighted 16 times in Booterstown, South Dublin between January 2011 and November 2018, thanks to Stewart Holohan, Sean Kingston and Jan Rod. I must say that, because we had a pretty good handle on the whereabouts of this bird away from Aberdeen out with the breeding season, I became a little obsessed in trying to find where it was breeding. We have had many ringed chicks returning to breed in or near their natal areas so it was more than likely to be in Aberdeen. I made appeals at SOC meetings and by word of mouth every year for sightings. I even offered a litre of Famous Grouse as a reward. To no avail. Then in June this year, I had a call from Woodend Hospital that there were two chicks in an enclosed area and could I come and see them. I went to have a look and the adult came and alarmed at me. Imagine my amazement when I saw it was 'N87'! The bird I had been looking for all these years - 12 years after ringing it as a chick. Just great. If I had known I was going to be the one who found it I would have made the reward a bottle of Islay malt. Apparently, the bird has bred there for several years. We ringed the chicks and they fledged successfully.

No such problems for John Bowler on the island of Tiree

Oystercatchers nesting up on roofs or hiding in quadrangles isn't a problem for John Bowler on the island of Tiree.

Two colour-ringed Oystercatchers - one ringed in Ireland and one ringed in Wales - bred together on Tiree and produced one fledged chick in summer 2019. Bird 'ZN' was ringed at Sandymount Strand, Dublin Bay, Ireland on 22 November 2014 and spent the 2017 summer at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree. Bird 'AY5' was ringed at Bangor Harbour, Gwynedd, North Wales on 19 January 2014 and also spent the 2017 summer at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree but the two birds were not paired and 'ZN' was seen back in Dublin Bay in the 2017/18 winter. In May 2018, the two birds were seen together at Loch a' Phuill on two occasions but they did not appear to breed and both birds were seen back at their respective ringing locations in winter 2018/19. In April 2019, it was clear that the two birds were paired at Loch a' Phuill and they built a nest there, although this first one was unsuccessful. However, they re-nested and succeeded in raising a fledgling in July 2019. Where will this fledged bird winter I wonder?

Plate 185. Colour-ringed pair of Oystercatchers, 2019, Tiree, Argyll. © *John Bowler*

Little Ringed Plover - real-time colour ring birding, Chris McGuigan & Nicholas Forrest

Over the past four years, several adult Little Ringed Plovers have been colour-ringed in east Scotland (only a single metal ring is used for pulli). This has allowed some close monitoring of the local breeding population as well as giving rise to numerous re-sightings of birds *en route* to or from winter quarters to the south (most in England but two recoveries in Spain).

For example, at 10:30 hrs on 22 July 2019, Nicholas Forrest photographed a colour-ringed Little Ringed Plover at RSPB Saltholme, at Billingham, Cleveland in north-east England. It was one of 35 or so seen there around that time. He emailed at 11:00 hrs and CM was able to quickly respond with the history of the bird. It had been ringed in Angus as a breeding adult female on 26 May 2017 and has returned to breed successfully at the same site each year since. We were also able to correspond in real time with the local keeper who keeps a close eye on the breeding site and he confirmed that the bird's male partner and their two juveniles were still there.

This fits what we had suspected in previous years: in common with some other wader species, the female often heads south first, leaving the male and the rest of the family to catch up later. We were able to give Nicholas this info while he had the bird in front of him!

Sandwich Terns - read those metal rings

Many birdwatchers and photographers enjoy coming across a colour-ringed bird during their trips. The challenge of reading the letters or combination before the bird flies away is fuelled by the potential outcome of gaining some knowledge about the bird's movements (or lack of), age and history when they receive some feedback from the ringer. Some get a bit frustrated when they come across a bird with just a metal ring, feeling the ringer has missed a trick by not making it more readily identifiable in the field for both parties to gain a little bit more information about the bird.

Sandwich Tern ringers on the continent have come up with a solution somewhere in between by manufacturing metal rings with larger-than-usual inscriptions - a vertical code in two rows, reading up and down the ring. This, at least, allows the potential for the ring to be read through a telescope or from digital photographs.

Matthias Haupt, on behalf of Sandwich Tern ringers in Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Poland, points out that this is not a colour-ringing project. He asks that sightings of any of those birds should be reported to our national ringing office or to contact the project leader of the country. The contacts as shown in Figure 1 will provide you with the ringing details.

Metal rings of this design from Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands have been read this summer on Sandwich Terns breeding in the Sands of Forvie NNR colony by the River Ythan in North-east Scotland. Every year there is evidence of immigration and emigration throughout colonies in the UK and Ireland and the continent, a natural survival mechanism in case any one particular colony runs into trouble.

When we reported metal-ringed bird '6A6070 Helgoland, Germany' to Matthias, saying it was breeding at Forvie, he replied to let us know it

Plate 186. The colour-ringed Little Ringed Plover at RSPB Saltholme, Cleveland, July 2019, being photographed and watched by Nicholas Forrest as Chris McGuigan emailed him the ringing information, then also confirmed its mate was still at the breeding site with their twa bairns! © *Nicholas Forrest*

Plate 187. Metal-ringed juvenile Sandwich Tern, Fanö, Denmark, 14 July 2018. © *Ulf Berthelsen*

had been ringed as a chick in the colony at Hallig Norderoog, and in return he said he had seen red darvic ring 'ENS' breeding there this summer - a juvenile ringed on the River Ythan on 2 August 2011.

As a footnote, who needs engraved darvics, colour rings or funky metal rings any way when you have super ring readers like Lee Collins keeping an eye out for ringed birds at Dawlish Warren NNR in Devon? No ring is unreadable in Lee's binoculars, as confirmed by his latest in a long line of ring reads from him over the years. A Forvie Sandwich Tern chick ringed on 11 June 2018 with just the customary small and rather dark D monel metal ring was read by Lee at Dawlish on 17 July 2019.

The migrations of Common Sandpipers

There is increasing concern about the decline in numbers of Afro-Palaearctic migrant birds that breed in Europe. One of these is the Common Sandpiper, which declined across Europe by 21% during 1980–2009. As with many migrant species, there have been population studies on the breeding grounds, and one found that the long-term decline was due to a reduction in adult survival. It was stressed that there was a need to understand more about the migrations and non-breeding areas of Common Sandpipers, as this may help to understand the decline.

To investigate this little-known aspect of the annual cycle, breeding Common Sandpipers in Highland Scotland were fitted with geolocators.

Small rings 6A0 000 – 6A4 999 and Large rings 6A5 000 – 6A9 999
German Bird RC ring@ifv-vogelwarte.de
questions: Matthias Haupt matthiasgull@googlemail.com
and Ulrich Knief ulrich.knief@web.de
Large rings PL0 000 – PL9 999 Polish Bird RC ptaki@miiz.waw.pl
questions: Szymon Bzoma szympz@poczta.onet.pl
Large rings V00 000 – V99 999 Danish Bird RC ringing@fugleringe.dk
questions: Kjeld Tommy Pedersen ktpedersen@snm.ku.dk
Large rings NL0 000 – NL9 999 Dutch RC info@vogeltrekstation.nl
questions: Dale Lutterop d.lutterop@ziggo.nl

Figure 1. Sandwich Tern metal rings with contact details.

From the data on the tags of ten birds that were recaptured on return, it was found that the median date of departure from Scotland was 9 July. Short movements were made within the British Isles to sites where the birds could accumulate migratory fuel, which was used to reach southern Iberia, where most birds staged before continuing to West Africa, arriving there on 28 July (median date). One bird did not stage and completed the journey in a single flight, but only as far as northwest Africa. Therefore, different migration strategies were involved.

Six of the ten birds spent most of the non-breeding season (October to February) on the coast of Guinea-Bissau, where the Archipélago dos Bijagós is one of the most important wetlands for waders in West Africa. Surveys have estimated that one million waders winter on the intertidal mudflats of Guinea-Bissau, including tens of thousands of Whimbrels and Common Sandpipers in the mangroves.

The other tagged Common Sandpipers spent the non-breeding season in Sierra Leone, Guinea, the Canary Islands and Western Sahara. The southward migration from Scotland took an average of 17.5 days (range 1.5–24 days), excluding the initial fuelling period.

The first northward movement from Africa was on 12 April (median date). Staging occurred in either Morocco, Iberia or France and arrival in Scotland was on 2 May. The northward migration took 16 days (range 13.5–20.5 days), similar to the southward journey.

In terms of determining possible causes for the decline in numbers of Common Sandpipers, loss of habitat in the main wintering sites is unlikely. Although the area of mangrove has been depleted in West Africa, the scale of loss (about 5%) seems insufficient to account for the decline in sandpiper numbers. Further, rice fields are expanding (some at the expense of mangroves), providing feeding areas for waterbirds. Meteorological data suggested that the weather during the southward migration was unlikely to be a problem because most migrated with tailwinds. However, some birds experienced strong crosswinds or headwinds during the northward migration to the breeding grounds (Figure 2), so these unfavourable winds may be an issue, as may be increasing drought in northwest Africa. A major limitation of our study was the fact that we obtained data only from birds that returned, whereas obtaining information on those that failed to return would be more illuminating. This will require tags that are more sophisticated than geolocators.

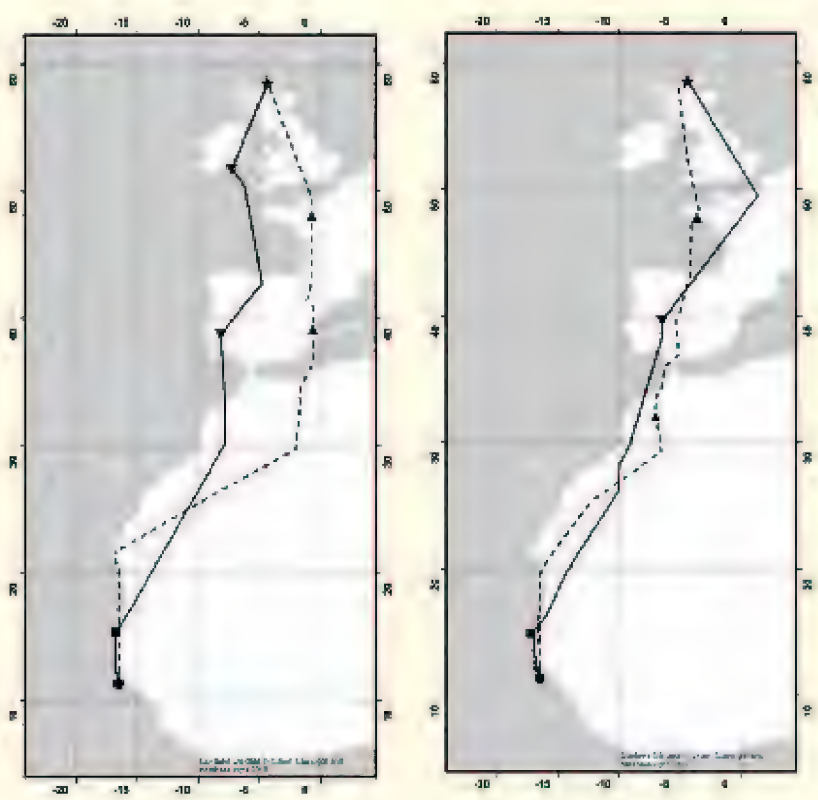


Figure 2. Contrasting migratory routes by two Common Sandpipers. The solid lines show southward tracks and the dashed lines northward tracks. Also shown is the breeding area in the Highlands of Scotland where the birds were tagged (stars), southward and northward staging areas (southward and northward facing triangles), locations in July–August (squares), and wintering areas in Guinea-Bissau (circles). The left bird appears to have been drifted eastward by west winds on the northward migration. Reproduced from Summers *et al.* (2019) with permission from Wiley.

The study was carried out by members of the Highland Ringing Group and fuller details were published in Summers, R.W., de Raad, A.L., Bates, B., Etheridge, B. & Elkins, N. 2019. Non-breeding areas and timing of migration in relation to weather of Scottish-breeding Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos*. *Journal of Avian Biology* doi: 10.1111/jav.01877.

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Selection of recent interesting movements

Chk = chick, Juv = juvenile, Imm = Immature, Ad = adult, m = male, f =female, vv = ring(s) read in field, R = retrapped, n =nesting

Peregrine

GC74849	Chk	03/06/17	Wicklow, Ireland
	Rnf	26/04/19	Scottish Borders

Kestrel

6246884	Chk	01/07/18	nr Trysil, NORWAY
	Rvv	20/06/19	Listonshiels, Lothian
			1100 km, SW

This Norwegian ringed chick was first sighted at the nest on a Trail camera before being retrapped for verification in a study by Graham Anderson and Keith Burgoyne.

Mandarin Duck

FB49536	Adm	27/11/16	Lower Basildon, Berkshire
	vv	21/04/19	Loch Spynie
			700 km, NNW

Some readers of *Scottish Birds* will recall the exploits of 'Mac' the Mandarin, a ringed drake Mandarin summering in Norway and wintering

in Aberdeen (*Scottish Birds* 36(3): 237–241). The above is a most unusual movement north from one of the key breeding Mandarin areas in southern England. Bob Proctor who read the ring, relates a similar story to 'Mac' in Aberdeen where the bird had been present for a while but only went to check it after a chance meeting with Jimmy Mair alerted him to the fact it had a silver ring on it. Bob thought there might have been the slimmest of outside chances it was the Aberdeen/Norwegian bird doing a grand tour of north-east Scotland before heading back over the North Sea. He decided to get to the loch early the next day and surprisingly managed to read the ring within about 15 minutes. Realising it was British, the thought was that it would likely be a short-distance movement from the Strathspey population and certainly didn't expect it to be from Berkshire, having travelled a distance of 700 km!

Baltic Gull

FF00968	Juv	17/07/18	Orivesi, Hame, FINLAND
	Imm	06/02/19	Gunknowe Loch, Borders
			1700 km, W

This, the nominate form of Lesser Black-backed Gull, has a very dark grey/blackish mantle and breeds on north Baltic coasts, northern Norway and the White Sea. All previous Scottish records of *fuscus* were discounted following review by SBRC in 2003, with these now considered to have been darker examples of the form *intermedius* which breeds in coastal southern Scandinavia and Germany. This record constitutes the first absolute proof of the occurrence of a *fuscus* individual in Scotland.

Black-headed Gull

EY21806	vv	25/07/19	Castlewellan, N. Ireland
EY21969	vv	25/07/19	Wig Sands, Loch Ryan, Dumfries & Galloway
EY21995	vv	23/07/19	Lisburn, Northern Ireland
EZ20117	vv	20/07/19	Belfast Lough, N. Ireland

The above were all colour-ringed as chicks in a colony in the Moorfoot Hills in the Borders. It would appear there is a large-scale evacuation of Borders birds over into Northern Ireland by the end of July. Below is a returning bird from Lithuania spotted by Alasdair Fyffe in Kilmarnock. Our wintering gull populations are swollen by birds from Scandinavia and The Baltic so it is no wonder some of our Scottish birds have to move out.

P142	Ad	08/03/10	Kaunus Zoo, Lithuania
	vv	17/03/18	Kay Park, Kilmarnock
	vv	06/02/19	Kay Park, Kilmarnock

Common Sandpiper

NW35915	Adm	23/04/19	Herriot Water, Borders
	vv	07/07/19	Wellington Gravel Pits, Herefordshire. 405 km, S

Still always nice to get an exact place and dot on the map from a colour-ringed bird to complement the findings from the geolocators above.

Goldfinch

AVE6043	Adm	05/12/18	Killearn, Stirling
	R	09/05/19	Hungladder, Isle of Skye 216km, NW
AXD0441	Adm	23/03/19	Light Oaks, Staffordshire
	R	02/07/19	Portree, Isle of Skye 551km, NW
Z397138	Im	24/01/15	Alnwick, Northumberland
	R	12/07/19	Portree, Isle of Skye 353km, NW

Three very interesting winter movements of Goldfinches ringed on Skye during the summer by Jonathan Jones. These and other similar movements of Goldfinches and Linnets suggest that finch populations expanding their range are likely to make longer winter movements from these more recently populated areas than from those where birds have been established for longer and, where conditions are favourable, appear to become more resident.

Plate 188. 'British Yellow Wagtail' *Motacilla flava flavissima*, male, Skateraw midden, Lothian, 2 May 2019. © *Ian Andrews*

Yellow Wagtail subspecies, forms and intergrades in Lothian during spring 2019

C. MCINERNY & I. ANDREWS

Range and taxonomy

The Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* has a broad distribution across the Western Palearctic where it breeds, being a summer visitor from Africa, Arabia and India. In breeding plumage, the species shows wide variation across its range, with these classified as either subspecies or named forms, the latter being distinct intergrades between subspecies (Alström & Mild 2003).

Yellow Wagtail is currently rare in Scotland, with a small number of breeding pairs in east Fife and East Lothian (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Murray *et al.* 2019, Shaw 2019). These are mostly of the British subspecies *flavissima*, but also of the continental European subspecies *flava* ('Blue-headed Wagtail') and *thunbergi* ('Grey-headed Wagtail'), and intergrades between these three, including 'Channel Wagtails' *flavissima* x *flava* (Smout 2002, Baxter 2010, Andrews & Gillies 2016).

Yellow Wagtails are also reported as uncommon spring and autumn passage migrants in Scotland, with observations mostly from the east side of the country and on islands, particularly the Northern Isles (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Again, most of these are of the subspecies *flavissima*, *flava*, *thunbergi* and intergrades, although the south-east European subspecies *feldegg* ('Black-headed Wagtail') has also been recorded twice (Fair Isle 1970 and Lothian 1984).

The subspecies *beema* ('Sykes's Wagtail') was on the *Scottish List*, with one historical record (Fair Isle 1910), but this is no longer accepted (BOU 2010). It should also be noted that the Eastern Yellow Wagtail *M. tschutschensis* has been split from Yellow Wagtail (Pavlova *et al.* 2003, BOU 2018, Harris *et al.* 2018). Eastern Yellow Wagtail, breeding in the Eastern Palearctic, has been recorded once in Scotland (Fair Isle 1909), with this specimen originally thought to be of the

subspecies *M. t. simillima*, although subsequent DNA analysis resulted in the subspecies being undetermined, with *simillima* therefore removed from the *Scottish List* (BOU 2013, BOU 2018). A second bird (Fair Isle 1912), also thought to be *simillima*, was rejected as *M. tschutschensis* during this same review. *M. t. simillima* is now synonymised with the nominate subspecies *M. t. tschutschensis* (Alström & Mild 2003).

Lothian 2019 Yellow Wagtails

During April and May 2019, a fascinating array of Yellow Wagtails were recorded in Lothian by a number of observers. In many cases they were photographed and their identification tentatively suggested, with up to five subspecies and forms present. However, it is important to emphasise that the identification of Yellow Wagtails subspecies is difficult because of the widespread occurrence of intergrades (Alström & Mild 2003). Plumage features are important, but calls are also crucial for identification. Thus, the birds described in this article should be considered with this caveat.

'British Yellow Wagtails'

A number of 'British Yellow Wagtails' of the subspecies *flavissima* were seen at various sites in Lothian during April and May 2019, including in crop fields between Skateraw and Torness where they breed (Plate 188). A midden of livestock manure at this site attracted many insects, which in turn drew numbers of wagtails and pipits, allowing their close scrutiny and photographic opportunities. The photographed bird shown here is a typical male *flavissima* with a yellow and brown head, yellow supercilium, throat and underparts, and pale wing coverts. The call is a distinctive, high-pitched and clear '*psee*' or '*tsweep*', quite different from Pied Wagtail *M. alba* and Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*.

'Grey-headed Wagtails', Skateraw midden, 18 April and 2 May 2019

The first of the migrant subspecies was a male 'Grey-headed Wagtail' at the Skateraw midden found by James Ellison on 18 April (Plate 189). The *thunbergi* subspecies, breeding in continental Northern Europe and northern Siberia, is distinguished by having a dark grey head with no supercilium, darker ear coverts, and a small amount of white in the upper throat with an otherwise yellow throat, breast and underparts. This particular individual had a small yellowish-green mark on the crown, which *thunbergi* can occasionally show. Such birds have a call similar to *flavissima.*

A second *thunbergi* was present at the Skateraw midden on 2 May (Plate 190). This bird was different in having a thin broken pale supercilium, a darker black forehead as well as black ear coverts, and less white in the otherwise yellow throat and underparts.

Plate 189. 'Grey-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava thunbergi*, male, Skateraw midden, Lothian, 18 April 2019. © *James Ellison*

Plate 190. 'Grey-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava thunbergi*, male, Skateraw midden, Lothian, 2 May 2019. © *Ian Andrews*

Plate 191. 'Blue-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava flava*, male, Skateraw midden, Lothian, 27 April 2019. © *Ian Andrews*

'Blue-headed Wagtail', Skateraw midden, 27 April 2019

The next subspecies observed in Lothian was 'Blue-headed Wagtail' of the nominate subspecies *flava*, breeding in continental Western Europe, with a few birds seen at different sites. Here are shown photographs of a male that we observed at the Skateraw midden on the 27 April (Plate 191). It shows a bluish-grey forehead, crown, nape and ear coverts, a narrow white supercilium, and an indistinct pale subocular patch. The underparts were yellow with a small amount of white restricted to the upper throat. Together these features indicate *flava*. Such birds have a call similar to *flavissima*.

'*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtail, Skateraw midden, 27 April 2019

The 'Blue-headed Wagtail' on 27 April was accompanied by another male Yellow Wagtail which looked strikingly different (Plate 192). Instead, it had black ear coverts without a pale subocular patch, a contrasting grey crown and nape, and a white supercilium. It was also more vividly yellow on the underparts than the *flava*, with yellow wing coverts (pale or white in the *flava*); and had a small amount of white in the upper throat, which was otherwise bright yellow. Importantly, the bird was heard to call, and sounded similar to *feldegg* (IJA pers. obs.). *M. f. feldegg* has a different more raspy call to *flavissima*, *thunbergi* and *flava,* similar to Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*.

Such features indicate that this bird was likely a '*dombrowskii*' form of Yellow Wagtail that breeds in Romania, with migration through the eastern Mediterranean (Shirihai *et al.* 2002, Alström & Mild 2003, Dudley 2015, Birding Frontiers 2016). '*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtails are an intergrade between *feldegg* 'Black-headed Wagtail' and *flava* 'Blue-headed Wagtail' that show a distinct appearance.

Plate 192. '*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava* x *feldegg*, male, Skateraw midden, Lothian, 27 April 2019. © *Ian Andrews*

We believe that this is the first time that a '*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtail has been reported in Scotland. A bird resembling this form was seen at Musselburgh on 9 May 2016 (Andrews & Gillies 2016), but that individual had a largely black crown and grey nape, suggesting instead that it was another variety of *feldegg* x *flava* intergrade. Alström & Mild (2003) state that the crown colour of such intergrades is highly variable and many birds are intermediate between the classic '*dombrowskii*' and '*superciliaris*' forms, with '*superciliaris*' being another distinct and named *feldegg* x *flava* intergrade.

'*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtails have been reported elsewhere in the UK with, for example, one at Gwithian, Cornwall, England on 5 May 2008 (Cornish Birding 2008), which looked very similar to the Skateraw bird. Another bird resembling this form was seen on Bardsey Island, Wales on 11 June 2012, although it gave a *flavissima* like call (Bardsey's Wildlife 2012). But '*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtail is rare in Western Europe, having an Eastern European breeding range and eastern Mediterranean migration route to and from their winter grounds in East Africa, so this Scottish observation is noteworthy.

It should also be acknowledged that there is a very remote possibility that the Skateraw bird was instead an Eastern Yellow Wagtail of the nominate subspecies *M. t. tschutschensis*, which breeds in north-east Siberia and north-west Alaska, and wintering in south-east Asia (Alström & Mild 2003, Bot *et al.* 2014). Such birds are indistinguishable from '*dombrowskii*' Yellow Wagtails, having the same plumage and call, and are only safely separated by DNA analysis and/or range.

Possible 'Black-headed Wagtail', Musselburgh scrapes, 3 May 2019

Dave Allan discovered another Yellow Wagtail in the early morning of 3 May on the wader scrapes at Musselburgh (Plate 193). This bird had a black head with no supercilium, a bright yellow throat and underparts (with no white in the throat), and yellowish wing coverts. These features suggest that it was a male 'Black-headed Wagtail' of the subspecies *feldegg* that breeds in south-east eastern Europe. However, the bird was not present for long and was not heard to call; this meant that it was not conclusively identified, and remains only a possible *feldegg*.

Plate 193. Possible 'Black-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava feldegg*, male, Musselburgh scrapes, Lothian, 3 May 2019. © *Dave Allan*

Plate 194. 'Channel Wagtail' *Motacilla flava flava* x *flavissima*, male, Skateraw, Lothian, 10 June 2019. © *Stuart Gillies*

'Channel Wagtail', Skateraw midden, 20 May 2019

The last was a male bird resembling a 'Channel Wagtail', photographed by Stuart Gillies at Skateraw on 10 June 2019 (Plate 194). Such birds are *flavissima* x *flava* intergrades, breeding in maritime continental Western Europe along the English Channel. They show a paler light grey head than *flava,* but are otherwise similar, having a broad white supercilium and subocular patch (Baxter 2010). Such birds are being recorded more frequently in Scotland and have become a regular sight in the East Lothian breeding population since 2013 (*Lothian Bird Reports*).

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Seabird movements off the Isle of Tiree, Argyll

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This paper summarises seawatching data collected from the Isle of Tiree in 2001–18. Seawatches were conducted whenever conditions appeared favourable for seabird passage and were thus not conducted in a standardised way, although all counts were converted to mean hourly rates of passage per day. Results included record Scottish mean hourly rates of passage of 24,380 Manx Shearwaters off Aird on 22 June 2006 and of 6,900–7,000 Razorbills off Aird on 3–4 October 2003, plus record Argyll mean hourly rates of passage of 178 Storm Petrels off Hynish on 17 August 2005, 1,200 Gannets off Aird on 3 October 2003 and 1,320 Fulmars off Hynish on 13 September 2004. A late winter mean hourly rate of passage of 3,650 Kittiwakes off Aird on 2 February 2016 was exceptional in a Scottish context and equalled the record Argyll hourly rate of passage. There was also an unexpectedly large annual autumn movement of Great Skuas out of the Minch, including a record Argyll mean hourly rate of passage of 41 off Aird on 16 September 2013.

Introduction

The Isle of Tiree lies in the Inner Hebrides of Argyll and is roughly 17 km long and 3–9 km wide, covering some 78.3 km². Being the outermost of the Inner Hebrides and lying at the south end of the Minch (Figure 1), it is well placed for making observations of seabird passage. Previous observers and trial observations revealed that the best locations for observing seabird movements lie along the north coast at Aird during periods of strong west to NNW winds resulting in birds funnelling west out of the Minch and on the south coast at Hynish during strong SSW to SE winds resulting in birds heading SW around Hynish Point. This is because the island, along with the neighbouring island of Coll to the east, is aligned on a WSW to ENE axis, together forming a considerable barrier some 40 km long for birds trying to either exit or enter the Minch (see Figure 1). Unlike on the Uists, Outer Hebrides, SW gales are much less productive, as the western coastline of Tiree is relatively short (c. 9 km) and does not allow a build-up of birds along its length. To investigate the offshore movements of seabirds around the island, seawatches were conducted whenever apparently suitable conditions prevailed between 2001 and 2018 using the same vantage points and methods (Figure 2).

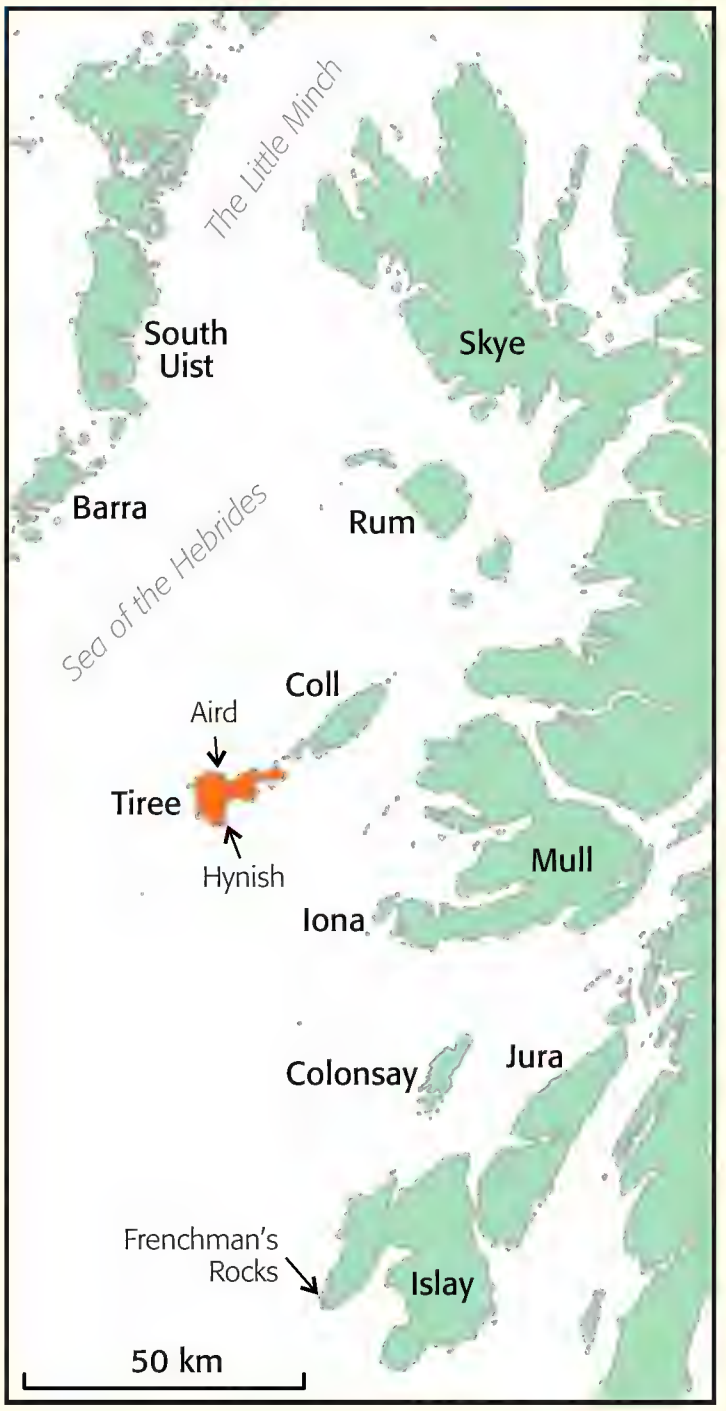


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Isle of Tiree and the key seawatching sites.

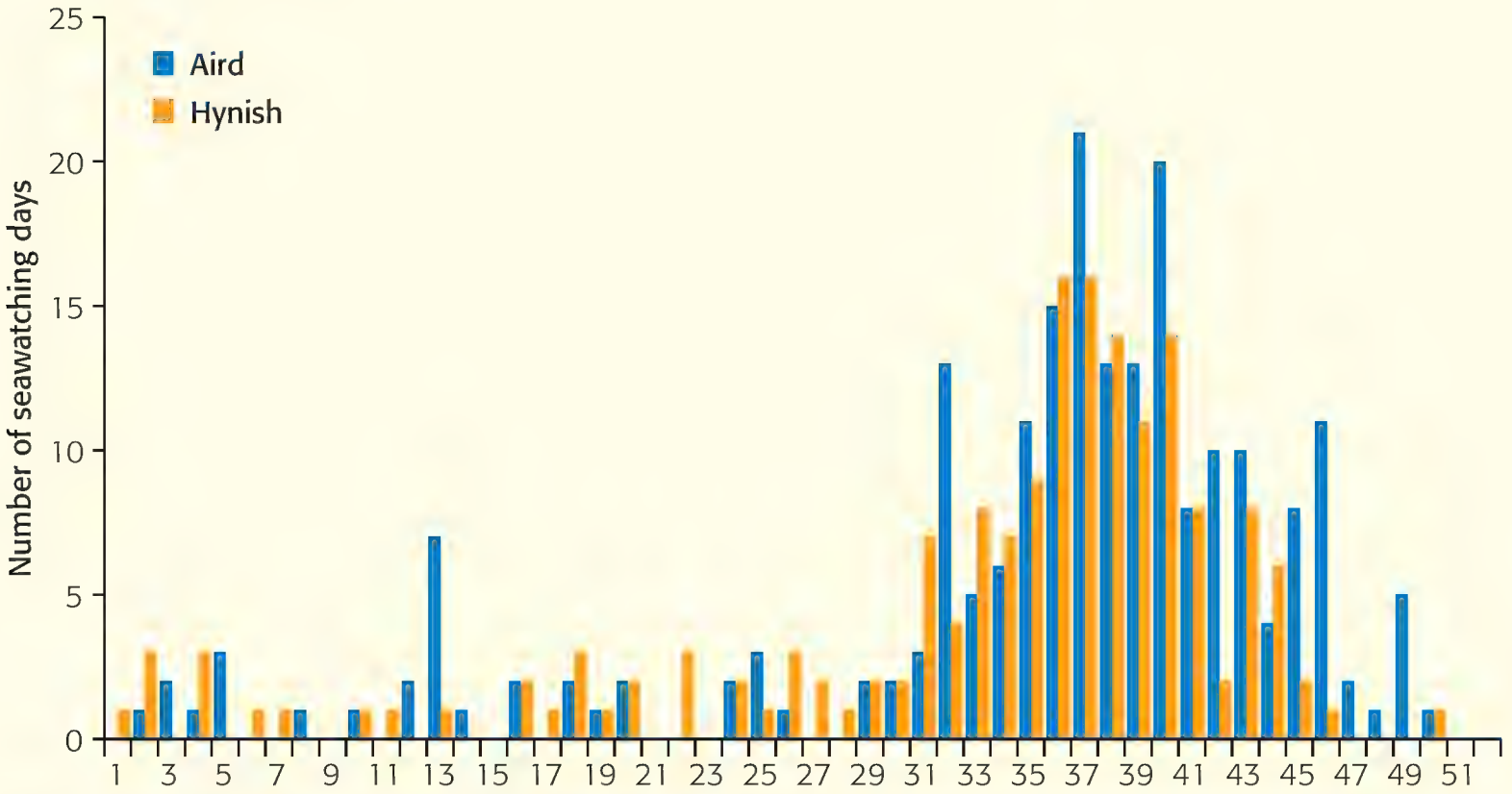


Figure 2. Number of seawatching days at Aird and Hynish, Tiree per week of the year (1–52), 2001–18.

Methods

Seawatches were conducted from a parked vehicle during which all seabirds observed passing offshore were recorded. Counts were made using a combination of binoculars and a window-mounted telescope and all birds seen were recorded in a notebook, together with the duration of the watch and weather conditions. On very busy watches, timed samples were taken to estimate totals of the more numerous species. Most watches lasted for one hour and where watches lasted longer than this, count totals were later recalculated to a mean hourly rate of passage by dividing the total of birds seen by the length of the observation in hours. On rare occasions when more than one seawatch was conducted on any one day, the counts were again combined to derive a mean hourly rate of passage for the day. Numbers given in the results and discussion sections are all given as mean hourly rates of passage per day unless specifically mentioned otherwise. Most seawatches were conducted in the first hours from first light, as this appeared to be the most productive time for seawatching both in terms of numbers and species diversity. However, productive seawatches were also conducted at other times of day, particularly when the wind changed direction or increased in speed, or when low cloud began to lift allowing birds to re-orient themselves. Most seawatches were conducted from the track end at Aird on the north coast (NL982480, altitude 15 m) and from the parking area above the pier at Hynish on the south coast (NL985393, altitude 5 m). Nine seawatches made from the car park at Balevullin (NL953475, 3 km west of Aird) were combined with those from Aird, as species totals were very similar at these two north-coast sites. Movements of non-marine wildfowl, as well as waders, were regularly recorded in the autumn but these are not dealt with here. Movements of Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* were recorded, as counts were often higher than the known island breeding population. Zero counts i.e. where a species was not recorded on a seawatch, are not included in the analyses as from the outset it was not known when each species might reasonably be expected to occur. Together with the lack of standardised sampling, this prevents robust scientific analysis of the results, although in practice the commoner species were recorded on all counts within their respective seasons of occurrence. Mean hourly rates of passage per week of the year (1–52, see Figures 3–24) were calculated by summing daily mean hourly rates of passage per week and dividing by the number of days in which seawatches were undertaken in that week. It was not possible to individually identify all Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* and Razorbills *Alca torda* observed

on the seawatches, so these two species were lumped into the category of 'large auks'. Sampling of these species showed that Razorbills tended to predominate in the autumn and Common Guillemots in the summer, as also noted by other observers (J.D. Wilson *pers. comm*). For rare species, only records that have been accepted by the relevant rarity committees are included here.

Results and discussion

A total of 387 seawatches were conducted, 216 from Aird and 171 from Hynish (Figure 2). They were in all months of the year from both sites, although most (71%) were in the key autumn seabird passage months of August to October. Species composition and numbers were broadly similar at the two sites, but there were major differences for some species. At Hynish, Puffins *Fratercula arctica* were six times more numerous and Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* and Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* three times more numerous than at Aird (Table 1), whilst Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus*, Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua* and large auks were all three times more numerous, and Kittiwakes twice as numerous at Aird than at Hynish. Differences in the abundance of some species of seabird between the north and south coasts of Tiree will relate at least in part to the distribution of nearby breeding colonies. However, the greater abundance of large auks, Great Skuas and Kittiwakes off the north coast, particularly in autumn, may relate to the greater likelihood of birds of these species being blown into the Minch by W/NW gales.

Divers

The most numerous diver was Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, which was twice as numerous as Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*. Great Northern Divers were recorded for most of the year, except for the period between 14 June and 11 August (Figure 3), despite the presence of a handful of mostly 2cy birds annually in the bays throughout the summer. Most records were in the autumn, particularly October, with a peak mean hourly rate of passage of 48 off Aird on 17 October 2017. Red-throated Divers also showed a similar pattern with none between 2 June and 26 August (Figure 4). The preponderance of Great Northern Divers over Red-throated Divers on Tiree was the opposite to that found at

Table 1. Mean hourly rates of passage of seabirds per day during seawatches at Aird and Hynish, Tiree, 2001–18 (zero counts excluded); n = the number of days during which the species was recorded.

Species	Aird (mean number of birds per hour)	(n)	Hynish (mean number of birds per hour)	(n)	Overall (mean number of birds per hour)	(n)
Red-throated Diver	2.5	63	1.4	30	2.2	93
Great Northern Diver	6.5	75	4.6	33	5.9	108
Fulmar	50.0	105	163.4	93	103.2	198
Sooty Shearwater	4.9	46	5.5	49	5.2	95
Manx Shearwater	1,508.4	114	493.1	81	1,086.6	195
Balearic Shearwater	1.0	4	1.2	10	1.1	14
Storm Petrel	3.5	20	10.2	57	8.4	77
Leach's Petrel	3.5	39	2.7	15	3.3	54
Gannet	200.0	240	180.2	113	191.2	353
Shag	42.9	18	68.1	44	60.8	62
Long-tailed Duck	1.9	15	1.0	3	1.7	18
Grey Phalarope	1.7	28	1.7	11	1.7	39
Pomarine Skua	1.7	44	1.8	13	1.7	57
Arctic Skua	2.9	62	2.2	23	2.7	85
Great Skua	6.3	100	3.1	51	5.2	151
Sabine's Gull	1.5	16	1.3	3	1.5	19
Kittiwake	260.3	130	104.3	104	191.0	234
Arctic Tern	15.9	57	12.6	39	14.6	96
Large auk sp.	753.2	107	192.6	70	531.5	177
Black Guillemot	3.1	70	4.1	32	3.4	102
Little Auk	2.7	20	2.5	2	2.6	22
Puffin	5.1	13	30.6	41	24.4	54

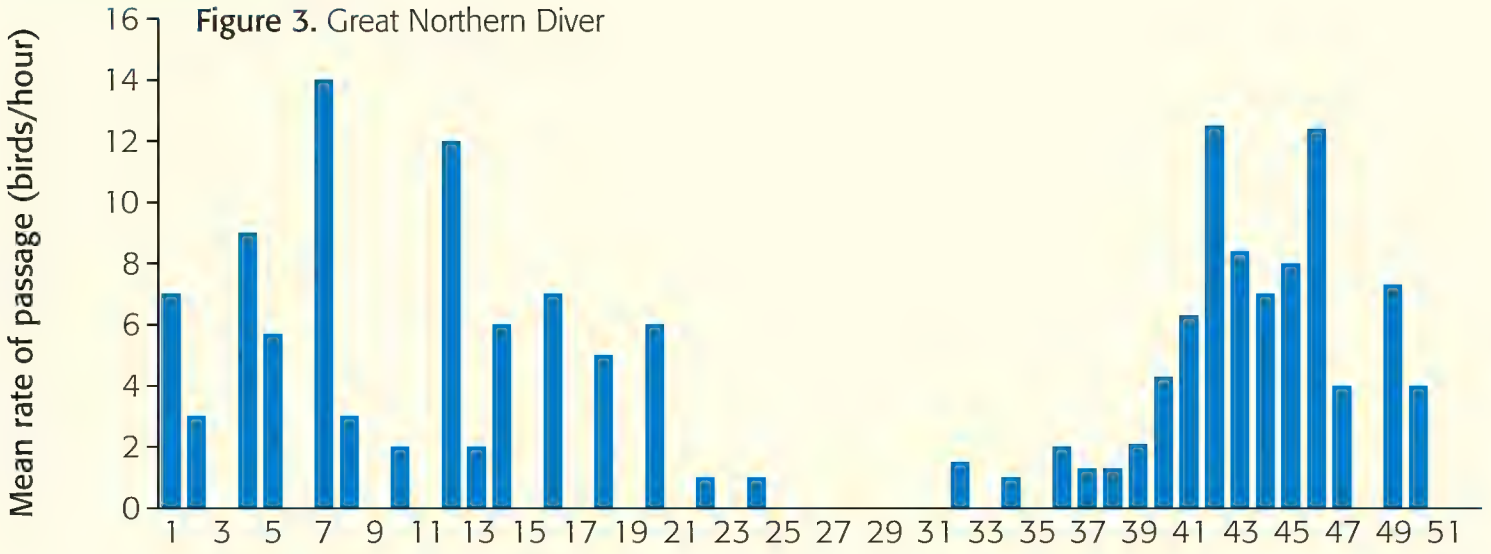


Figure 3. Great Northern Diver

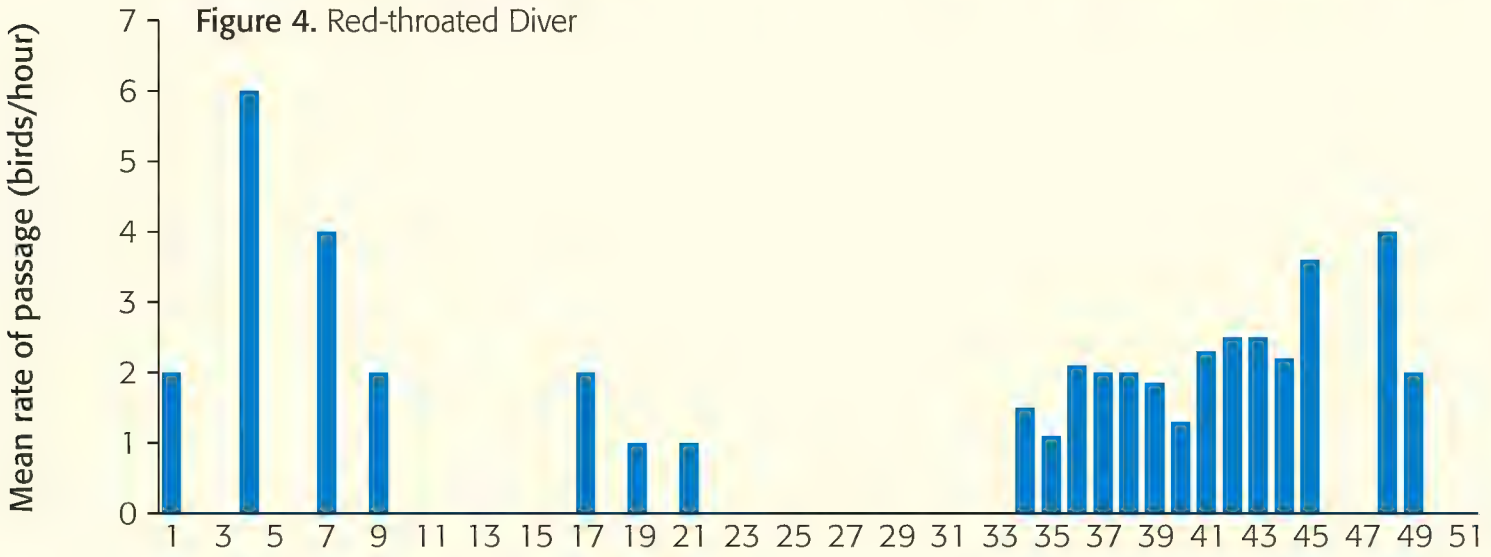


Figure 4. Red-throated Diver

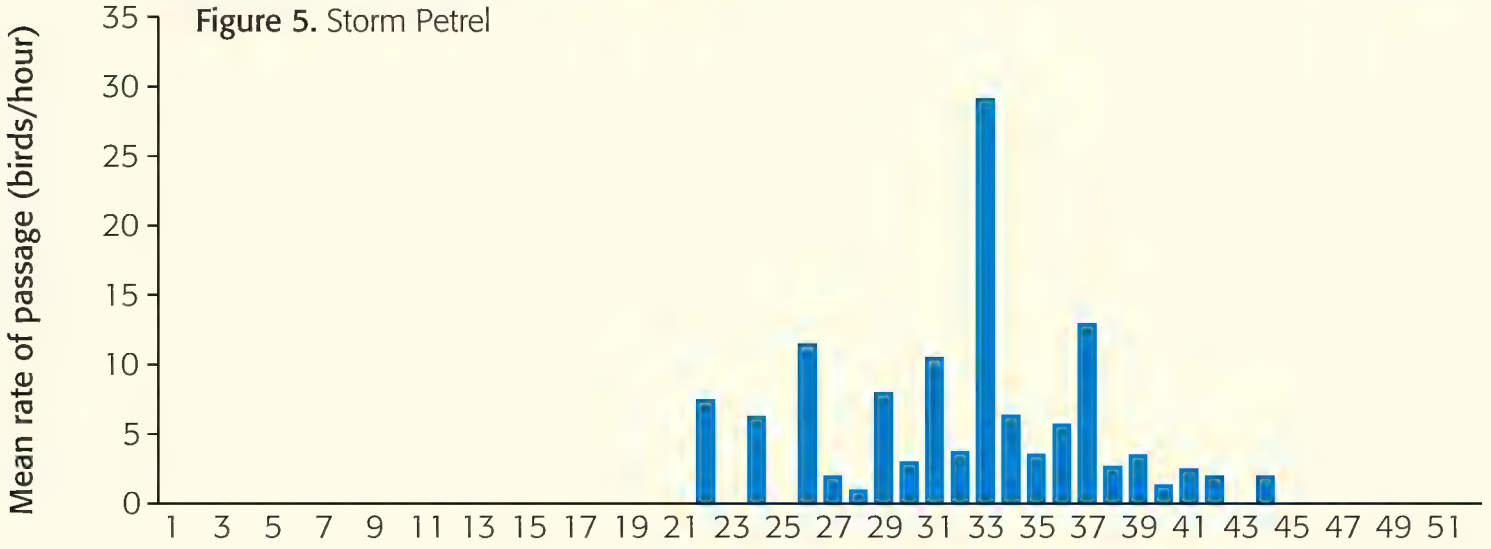


Figure 5. Storm Petrel

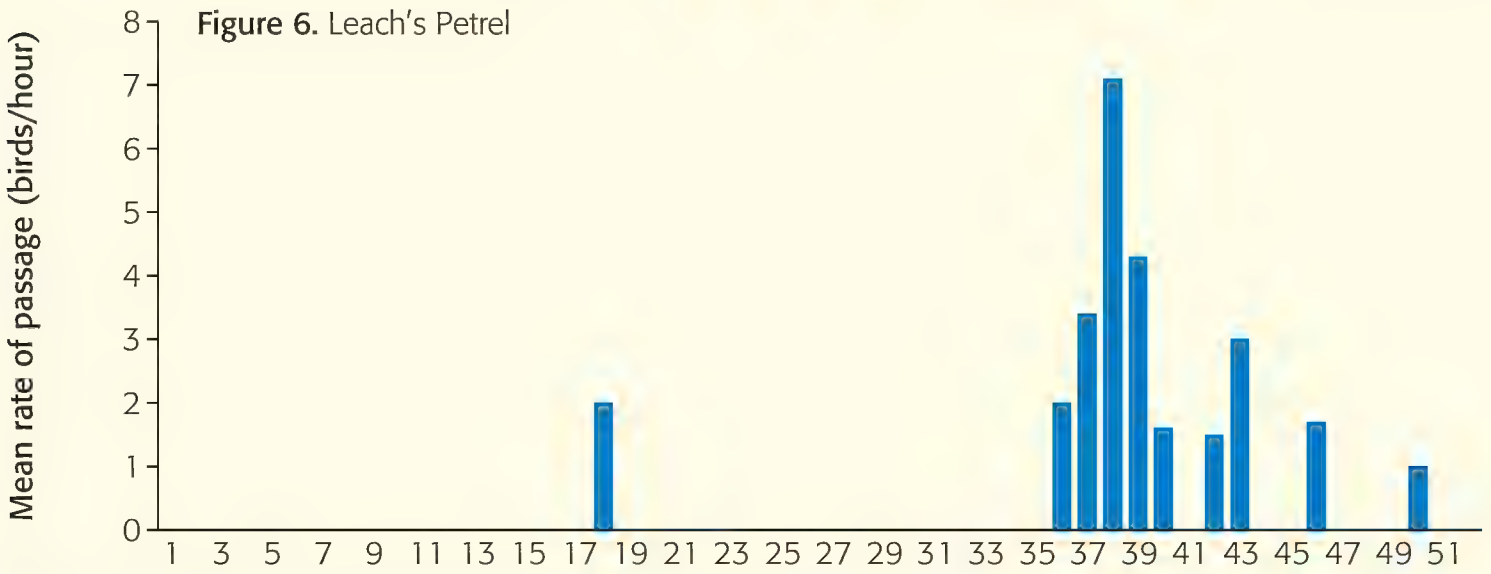


Figure 6. Leach's Petrel

Figures 3–24. Mean hourly rates of passage per week of seabirds off Tiree in 2001–18 (zero counts excluded)

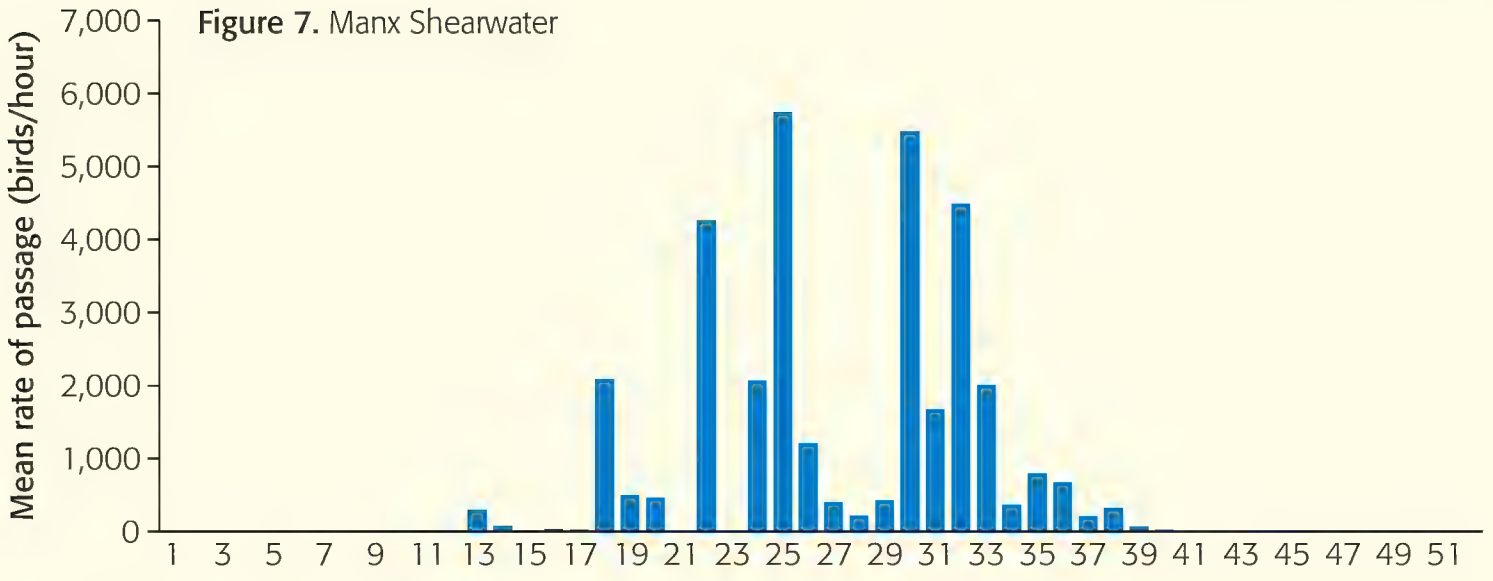


Figure 7. Manx Shearwater

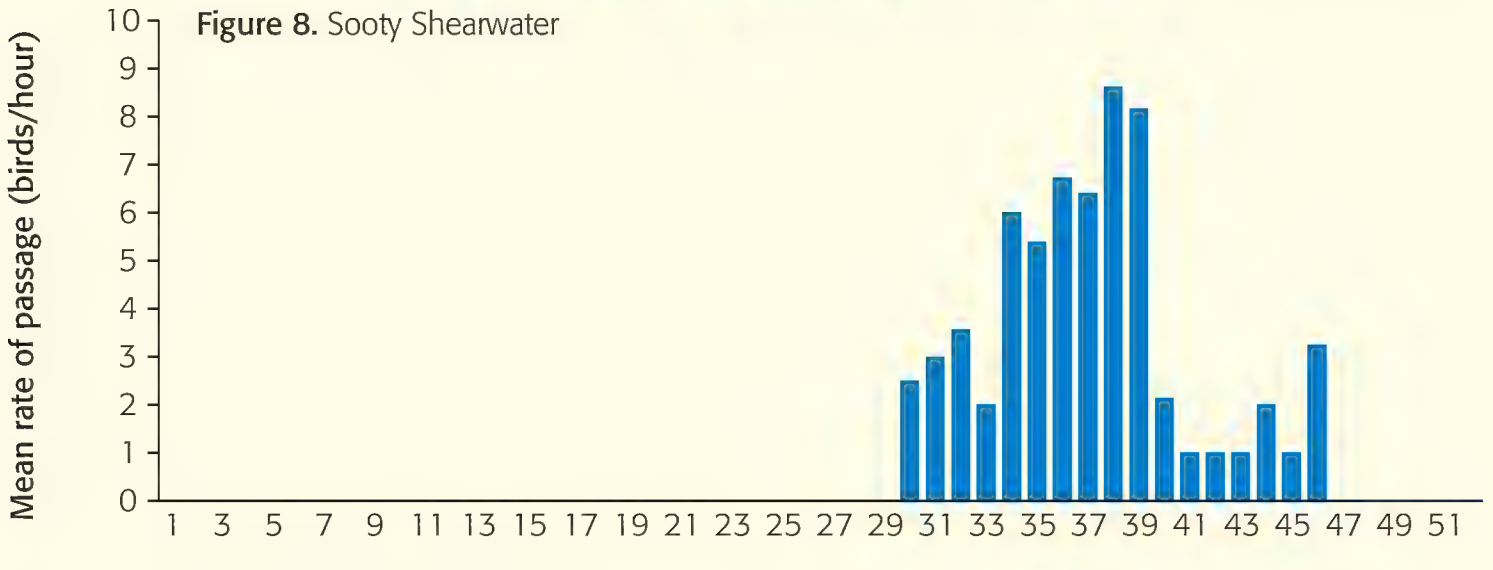


Figure 8. Sooty Shearwater

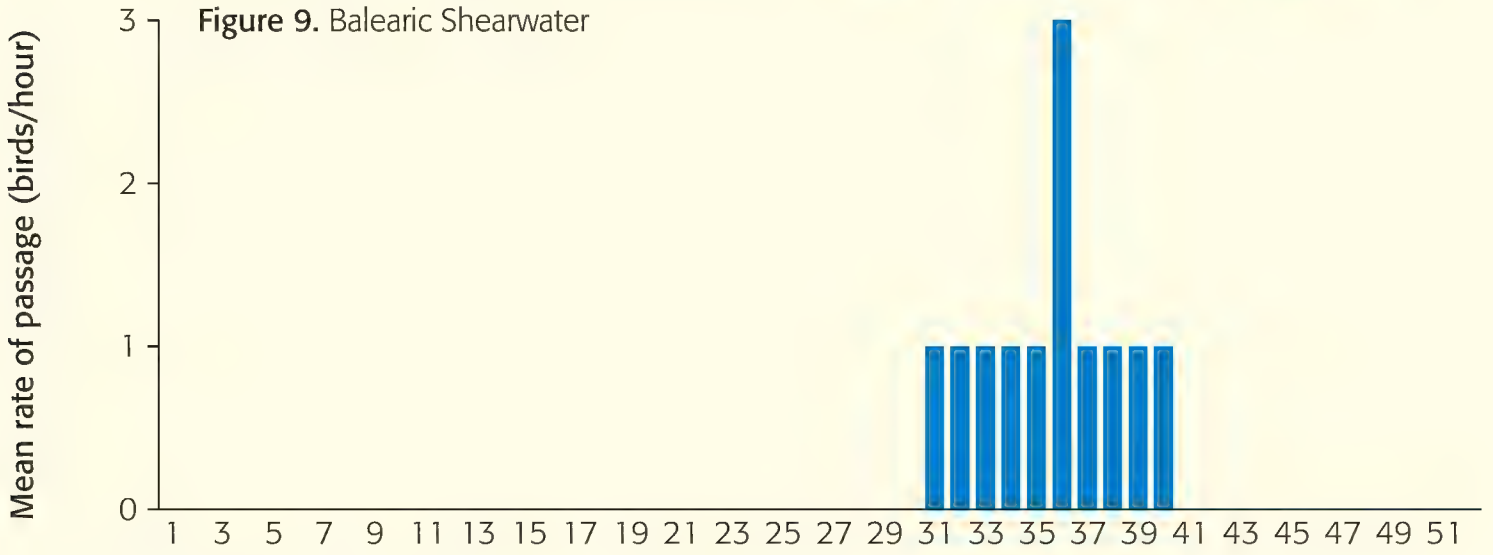


Figure 9. Balearic Shearwater

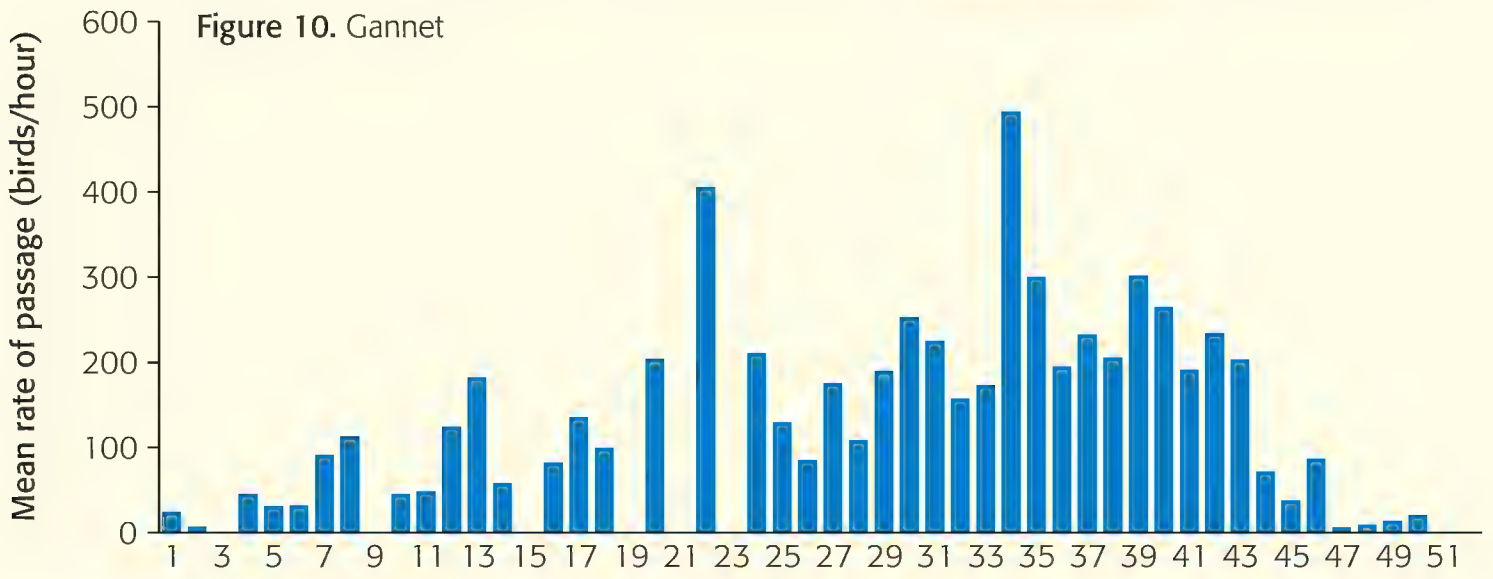


Figure 10. Gannet

Figure 11. Fulmar

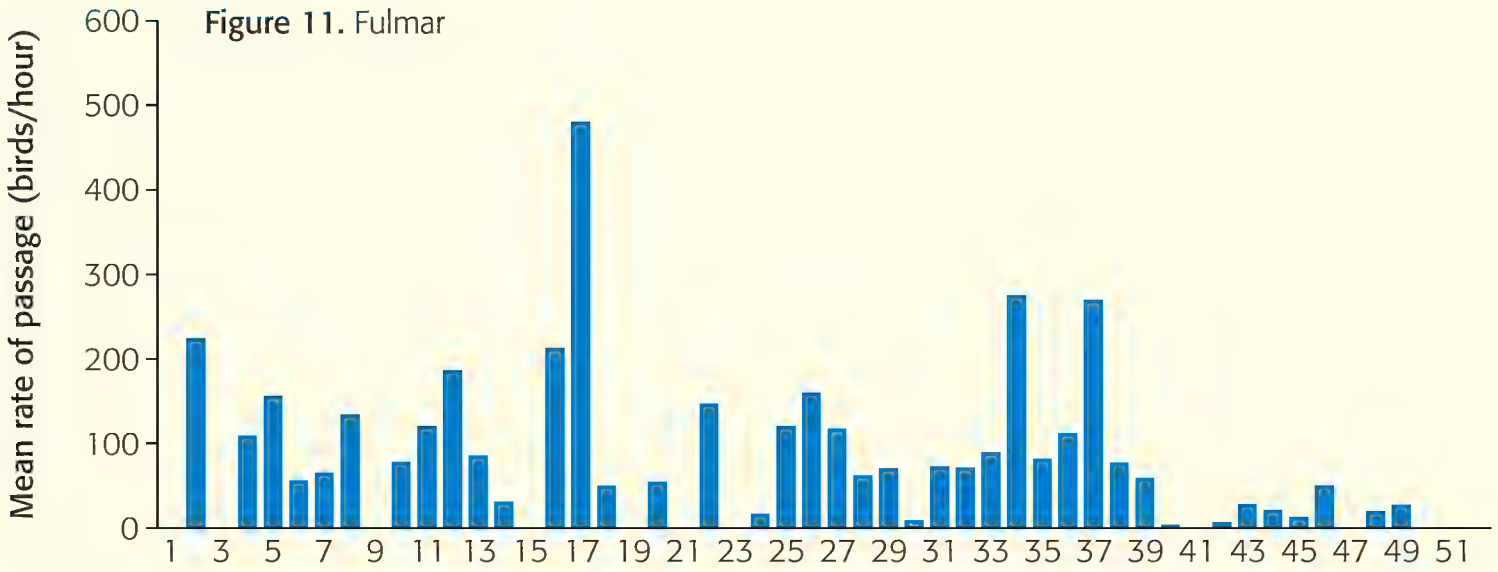


Figure 12. Shag

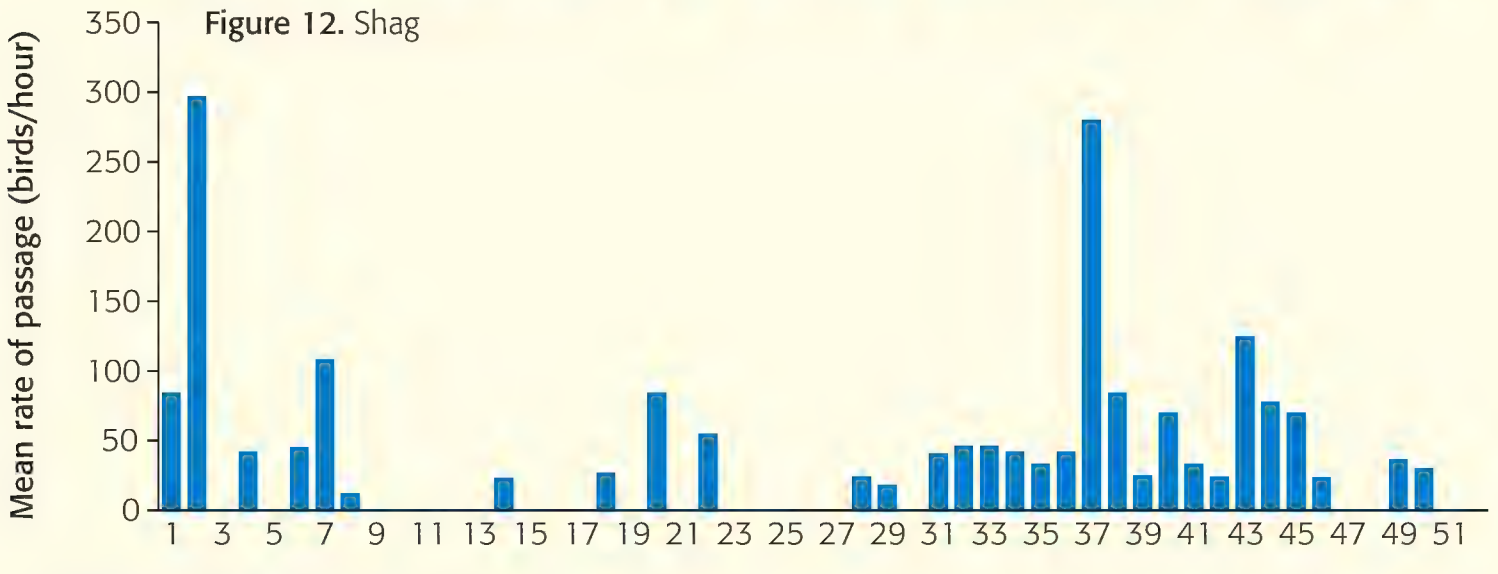


Figure 13. Large auks

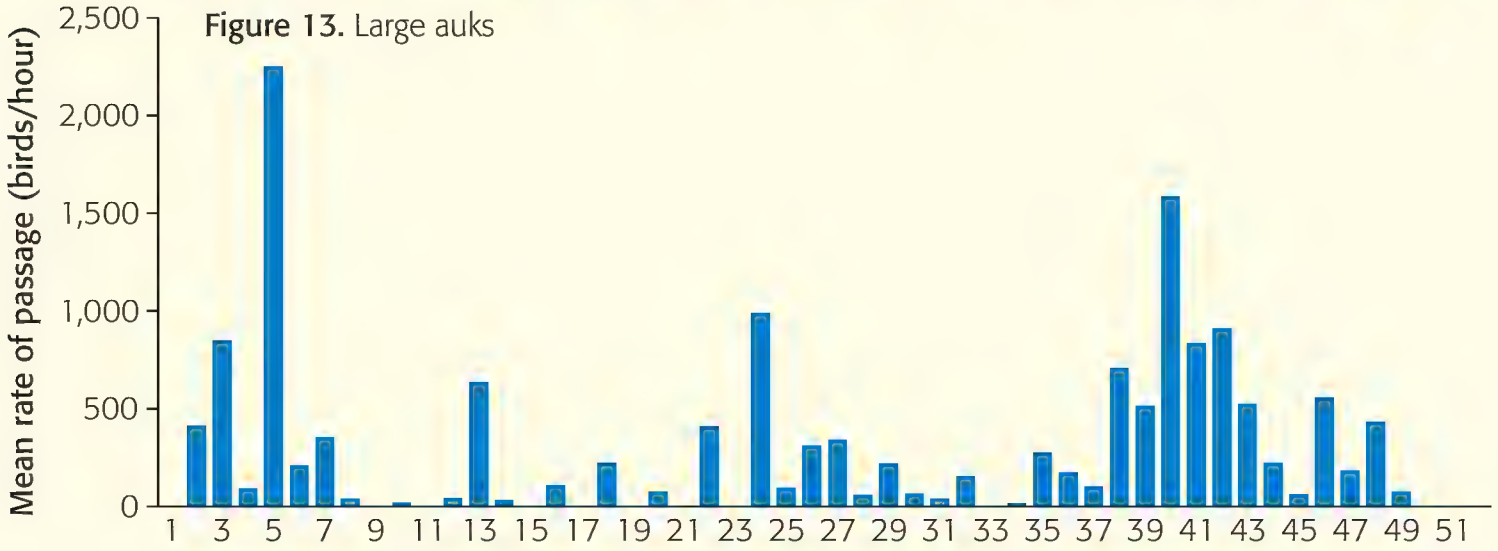
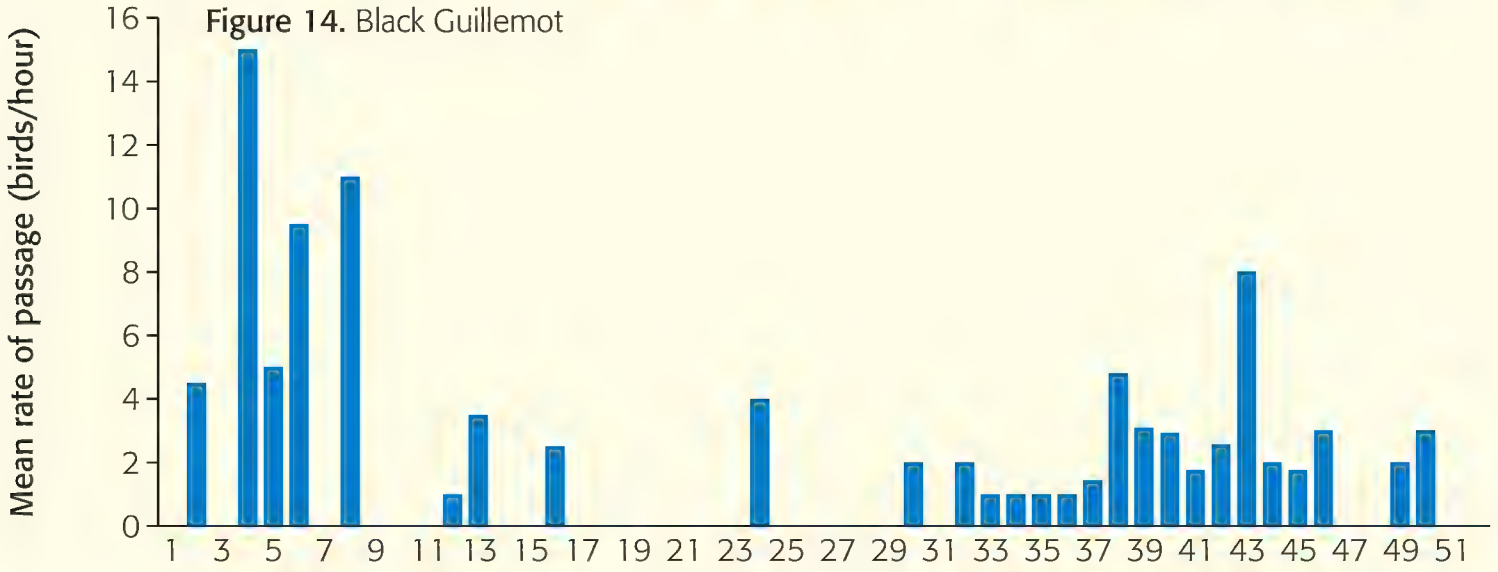


Figure 14. Black Guillemot



Frenchman's Rocks on Islay (Tristan ap Rheinallt pers. comm.). Great Northern Divers are numerous in the shallow seas around Tiree and Coll between October and May. The absence of Red-throated Divers on seawatches between June and late August was surprising, since small numbers of adult birds and family parties are regularly recorded feeding in adjacent shallow bays in summer. A single adult White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* flew west off Aird on 18 October 2011 but no Black-throated Divers *Gavia arctica* were recorded.

Storm-petrels

Storm Petrels were over three times more numerous than Leach's Petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* and were recorded from 1 June to 31 October with peak passage in mid-August with a mean hourly rate of 178 off Hynish on 17 August 2005 (Figure 5). Casual records also revealed the presence of this species in Tiree waters from 19 May (2012) with one very late bird in Gott Bay on 6 December 2007 (Colin MacFarlane pers. comm.). Leach's Petrels occurred almost exclusively in autumn between 6 September and 16 November (Figure 6). Two birds were recorded off Aird on 6 May 2005 during a severe westerly gale, which matches similar spring records from other sites on the west coast (Forrester *et al*. 2007). One bird was off Hynish on 14 December 2013 and this late record fits in with other scattered Scottish records from November to February which are thought to relate to young birds from more northerly colonies (Forrester *et al*. 2007).

Shearwaters

By far the most numerous species overall was Manx Shearwater, with a mean hourly rate of passage of over 1,000 birds and several movements of over 20,000 birds noted off Aird in June to August including a peak mean hourly rate of passage of 24,380 birds off Aird on 22 June 2006 which appears to be the highest to date from Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007) and followed a WNW gale overnight. The bulk of passage was between the last week of April and the first week of October (Figure 7). Seawatches in west to north west winds from dawn off Aird in mid-summer regularly revealed tens of thousands of birds streaming out of the Minch, the foraging movements of adult birds with young in burrows on Rum. The earliest record was of one off Aird on 2 February 2016 and the latest of one off Aird on 29 November 2013. Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* occurred only on autumn passage between 28 July (2007) and 17 November (2015) with most in September (Figure 8) and with a peak mean hourly rate of passage of 33 off Hynish on 5 September 2003. Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* was a rare autumn migrant with just 13 records of single birds appearing on passage between 2 August (2013) and 7 October (2004) (Figure 9). The two large shearwaters were very rare with just one confirmed record of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*, off Aird on 24 August 2005, and three records of Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*.

Gannet, Fulmar and Shag

Gannets occurred all year round, albeit in much lower numbers (1–20) between late November and mid-February (Figure 10). Highest numbers, typically 100–300 per hour, were recorded from mid-July to the end of October, with peak mean hourly rates of passage of 1,200 off Aird on 3 October 2003 and 1,160 there on 27 August 2007. The regular occurrence of Gannets throughout the winter off Tiree is not mirrored elsewhere in Argyll. However, Forrester *et al.* (2007) showed that the distribution of birds in Scottish waters in December–February tends to be further offshore. Fulmars occurred all year round with fewest birds in October to December and generally higher numbers in January to September (Figure 11). The peak mean hourly rate of passage was of 1,320 birds off Hynish on 13 September 2004 including one 'blue-phase' bird. Peak Fulmar counts at Frenchman's Rocks on Islay, as on Tiree, were mostly in early autumn, dropping away in October (ap Rheinallt *et. al.* 2007). The occasional record of 'blue phase' Fulmars from Tiree in autumn suggests that at least some of this passage involves birds from more northerly colonies. Shags were recorded all year with no obvious seasonal trends in numbers (Figure 12). Only around 120 pairs of Shags breed on Tiree (Bowler & Hunter 2007), however, so many of the larger movements may have included birds from larger colonies nearby.

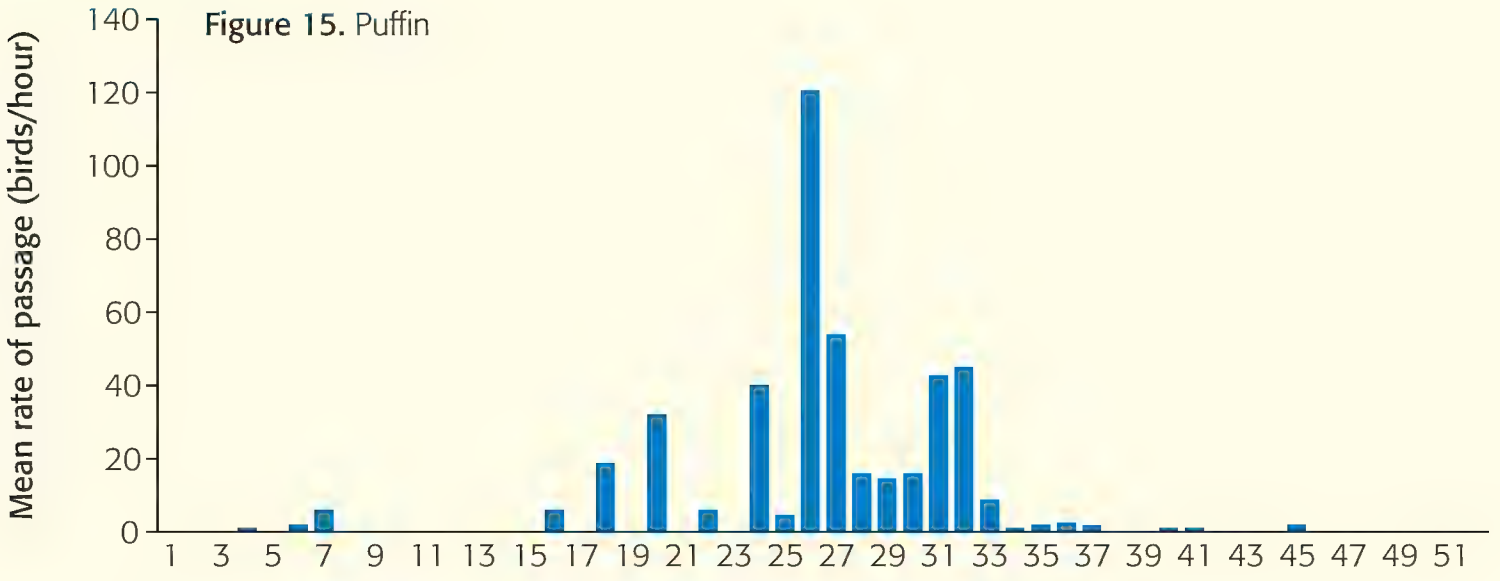


Figure 15. Puffin

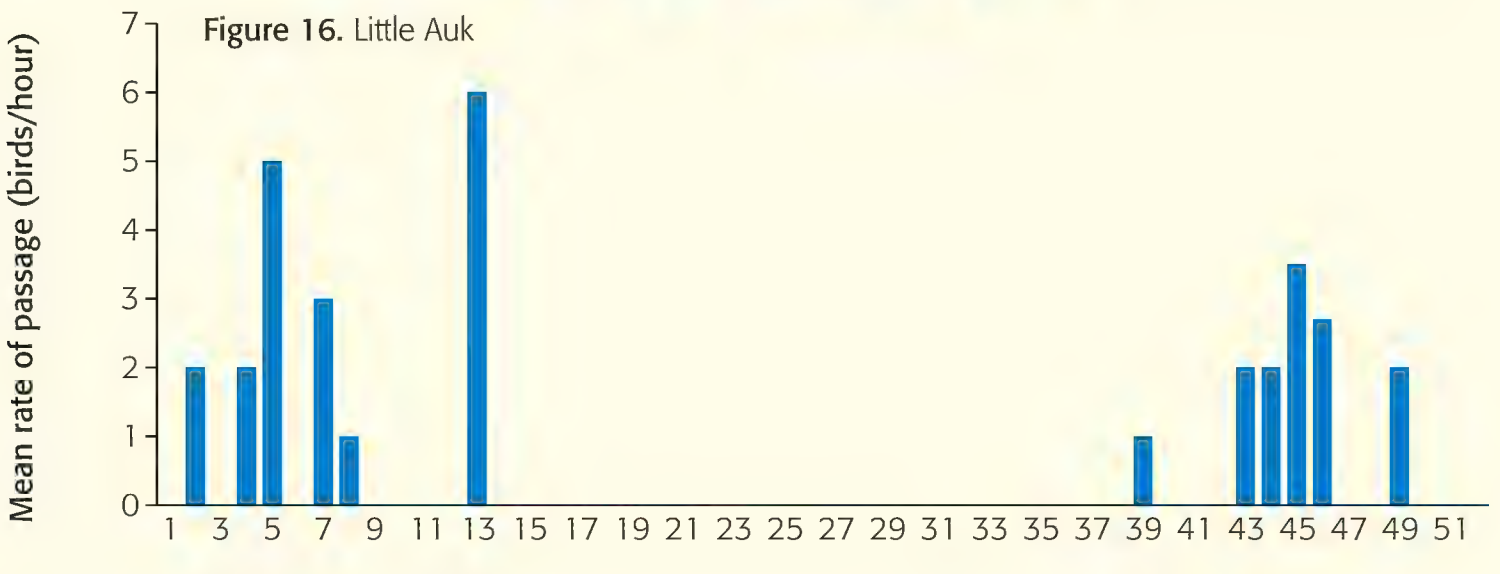


Figure 16. Little Auk

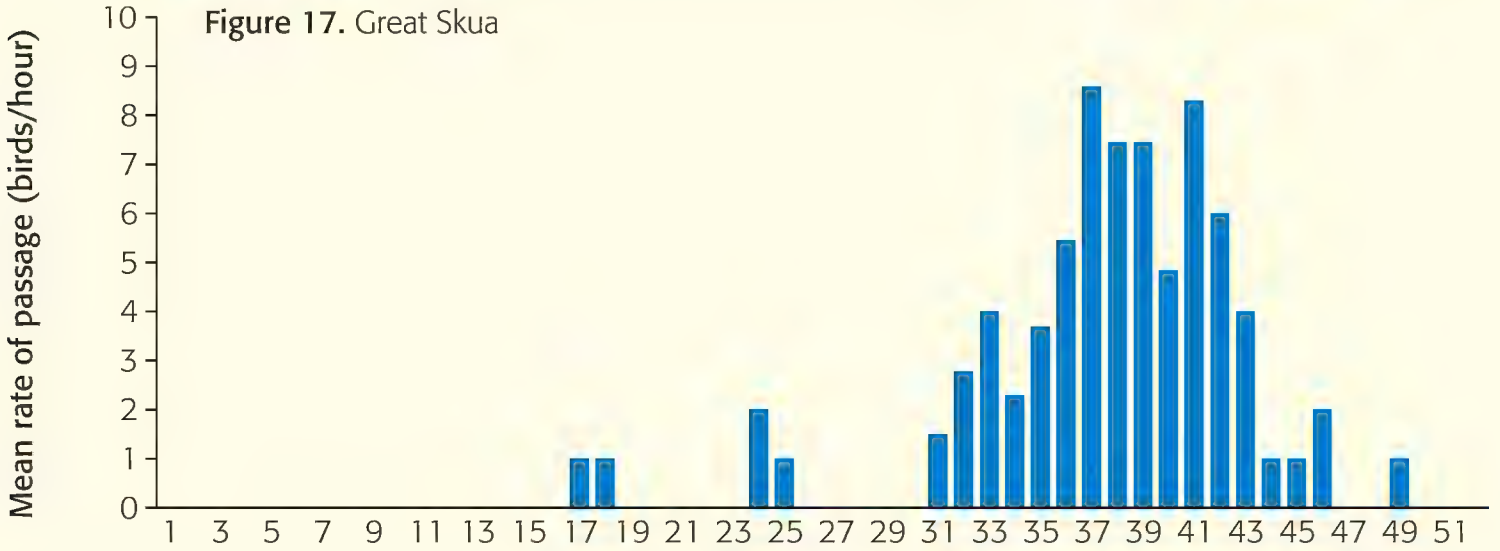


Figure 17. Great Skua

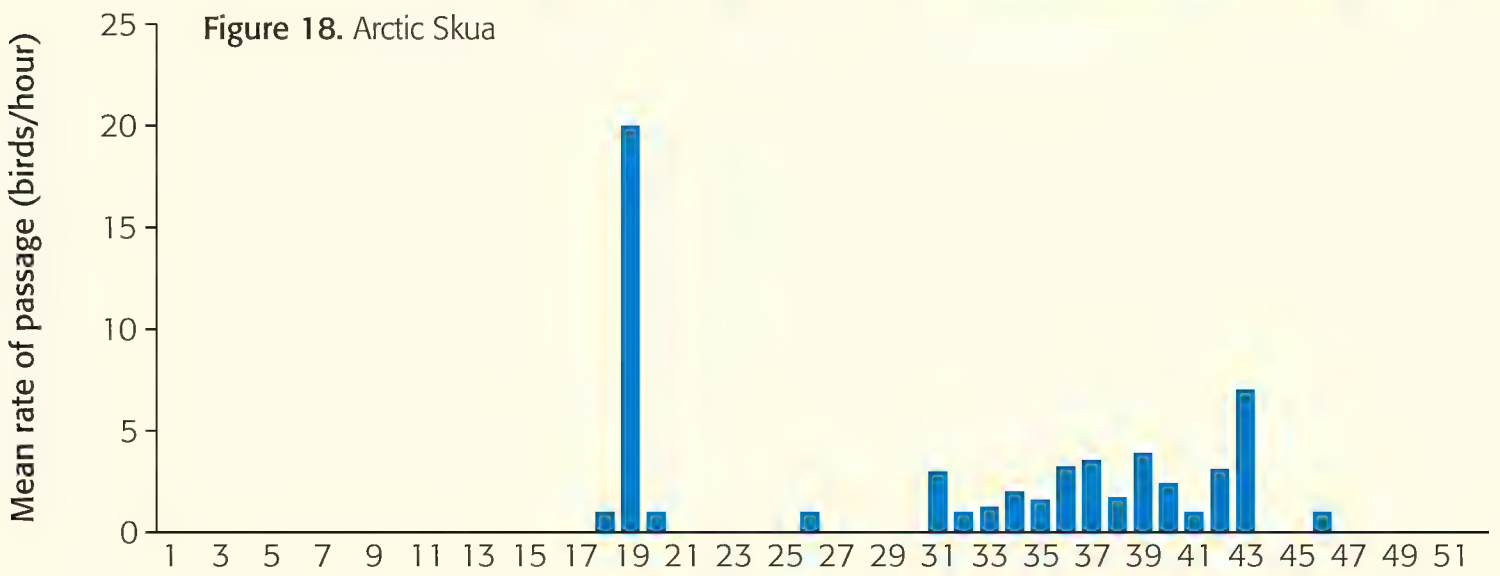


Figure 18. Arctic Skua

Auks

Large auks were recorded throughout the year with no clear seasonal trend in numbers (Figure 13). Highest mean hourly rates of passage were 6,900 to 7,000 off Aird on 3–4 October 2003, which were almost entirely Razorbills, the largest ever recorded in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007), whilst a mean hourly rate of passage of 6,400 past Aird on 2 February 2016 were mostly Common Guillemots. The very large autumn movements of large auks seem likely to include birds from colonies further north, as local birds have mostly departed their colonies by early August and totals of Razorbill far exceeded the numbers breeding in Argyll. The high number of Common Guillemots off Aird on 2 February 2016 after a NW storm suggests that larger numbers of this species may winter offshore. Black Guillemots *Cepphus grylle* were also recorded all year round but higher numbers were recorded in August to February with much lower numbers in March to late July (Figure 14). The pattern of higher numbers of Black Guillemots off Tiree in August to February differed markedly from Frenchman's Rocks, Islay, where winter numbers were much lower than in June–July (Tristan ap Rheinallt pers. comm.). This suggests that seas around Tiree may be more important for wintering birds than indicated by the small local breeding population and this was borne out during vessel-based surveys of the waters to the west of Tiree in the 2009/10 winter (Scottish Power data). Puffins were predominantly recorded from mid-April to mid-August (Figure 15) with a peak mean hourly rate of passage of 234 off Hynish on 6 August 2016. They were recorded occasionally in much smaller numbers in autumn to 11 November (2008) and from as early as 26 January (2017). Little Auks *Alle alle* were only recorded in small numbers in the winter months (Figure 16). The earliest record in autumn was on 30 September (2018) (Jim Dickson pers. comm.) and the latest was of six off Aird on 26 March (2015).

Skuas

Great Skuas were almost twice as numerous as Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Great Skuas were mostly recorded between the start of August and mid-November (Figure 17) with many mean hourly rates of 10–20 birds. Odd birds were recorded in late spring and summer. The latest record was of one off Aird on 7 December 2017. Arctic Skuas were mostly recorded from the start of August to mid-October (Figure 18). However, spring passage was also recorded on occasion in the first half of May. The latest record was of one off Aird on 12 November 2005. The predominance of Great Skuas over Arctic Skuas was surprising as this is generally not the case at other Scottish seawatching sites (Forrester *et al.* 2007), although has also been noted on Skye (McMillan 2005). Great Skuas from Shetland predominantly pass down the east coast. However, numbers of Great Skua recorded from Tiree in autumn are higher than those from a site in Lothian, with hourly totals as high or higher than entire day counts from Hound Point (McInerny & Griffin 2007). Counts from west-facing sites on the Outer Hebrides are lower than on Tiree. This highlights the importance of the Minch as an autumn migratory route for this species.

Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* were predominantly seen on autumn passage from early August until mid-November (Figure 19). The only spring record was of five off Hynish on 4 May 2018. Long-tailed Skuas *Stercorarius longicaudus* were only recorded on five occasions between 14 September (2007) and 17 October (2017). The rarity of both Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas on spring passage was in marked contrast to high day counts in April–May of both species from the Uists (Forrester *et al.* 2007 and Outer Hebrides Bird Reports).

Gulls

Kittiwakes were recorded throughout the year (Figure 20). Numbers were generally highest in autumn from late August to the start of December with a peak mean hourly rate of passage of 2,170 off Aird on 12 November 2005 but there were also occasional high mean hourly rates of passage in late winter including 3,650 off Aird on 2 February 2016. Sabine's Gulls *Xema sabini* were recorded on 19 dates, involving 28 birds, all between 7 September (2011) and 22 October (2015) (Figure 21). A peak of seven birds was seen in autumn 2011 but there were more blank years (ten), than years in which they were seen (eight). Little Gulls *Hydrocoloeus minutus* were recorded on four occasions in autumn, all off Aird between

Figure 19. Pomarine Skua

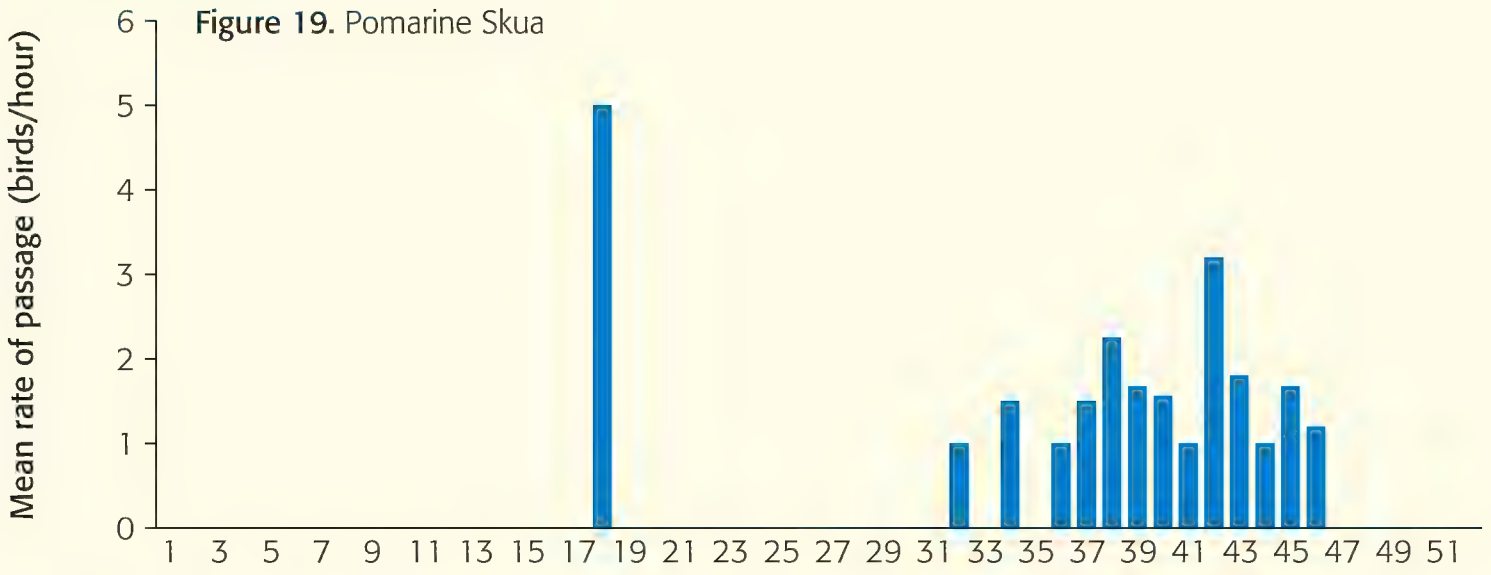


Figure 20. Kittiwake

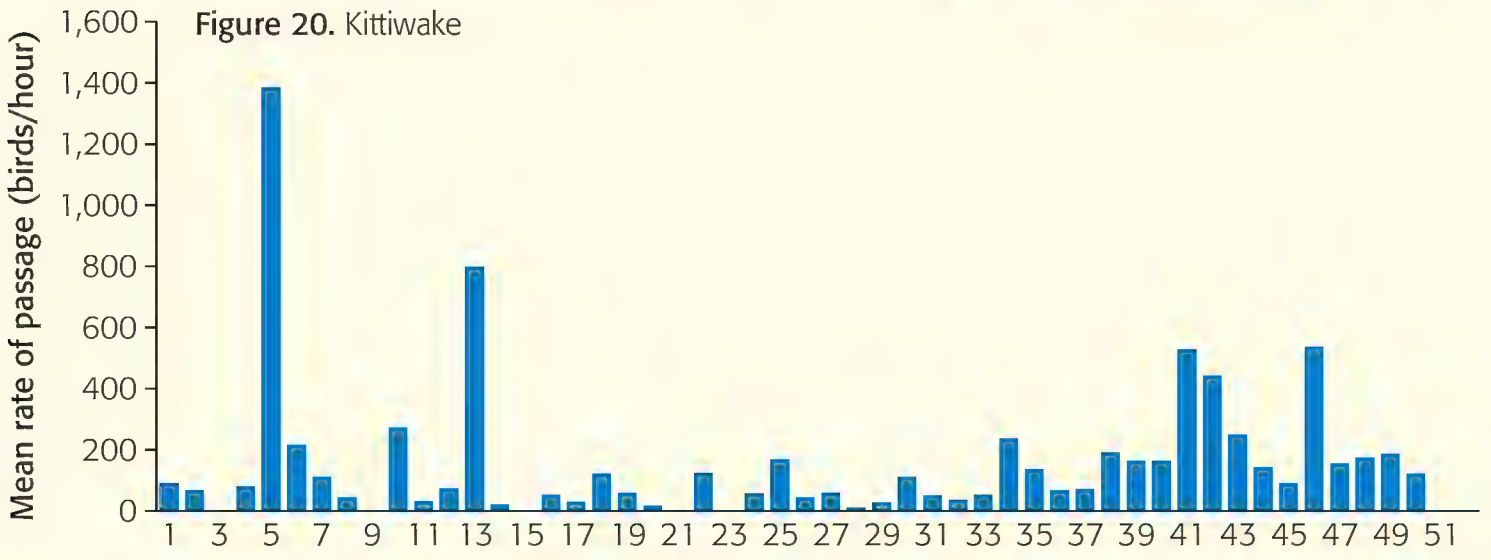


Figure 21. Sabine's Gull

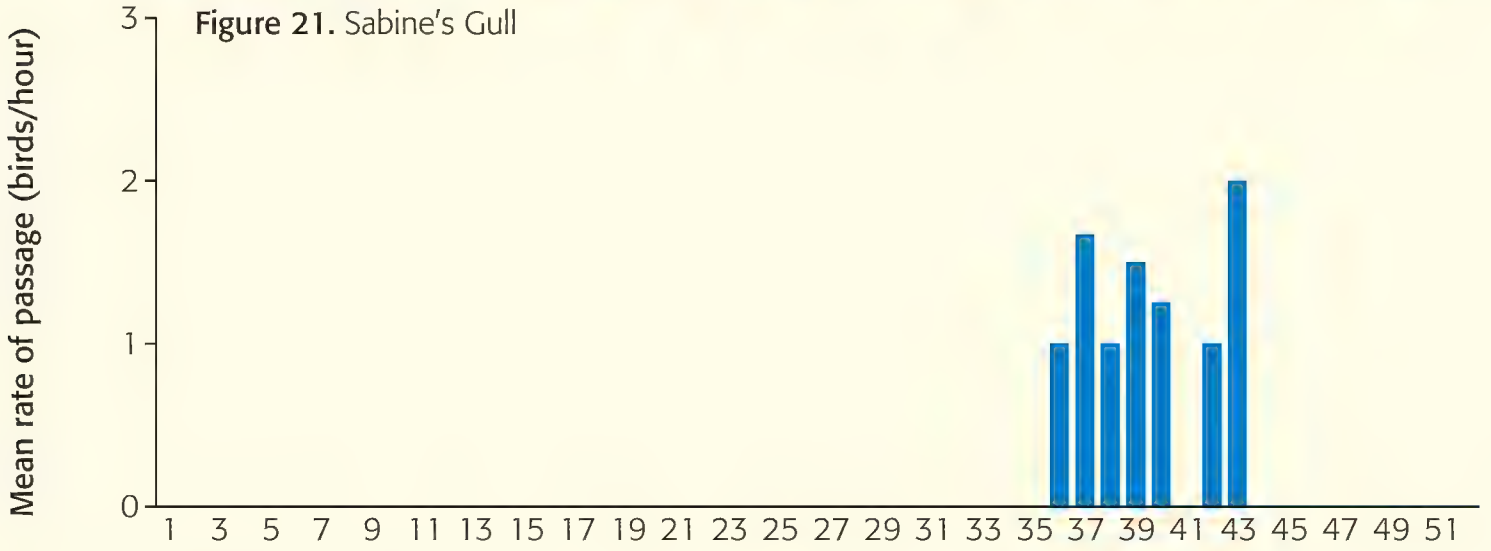
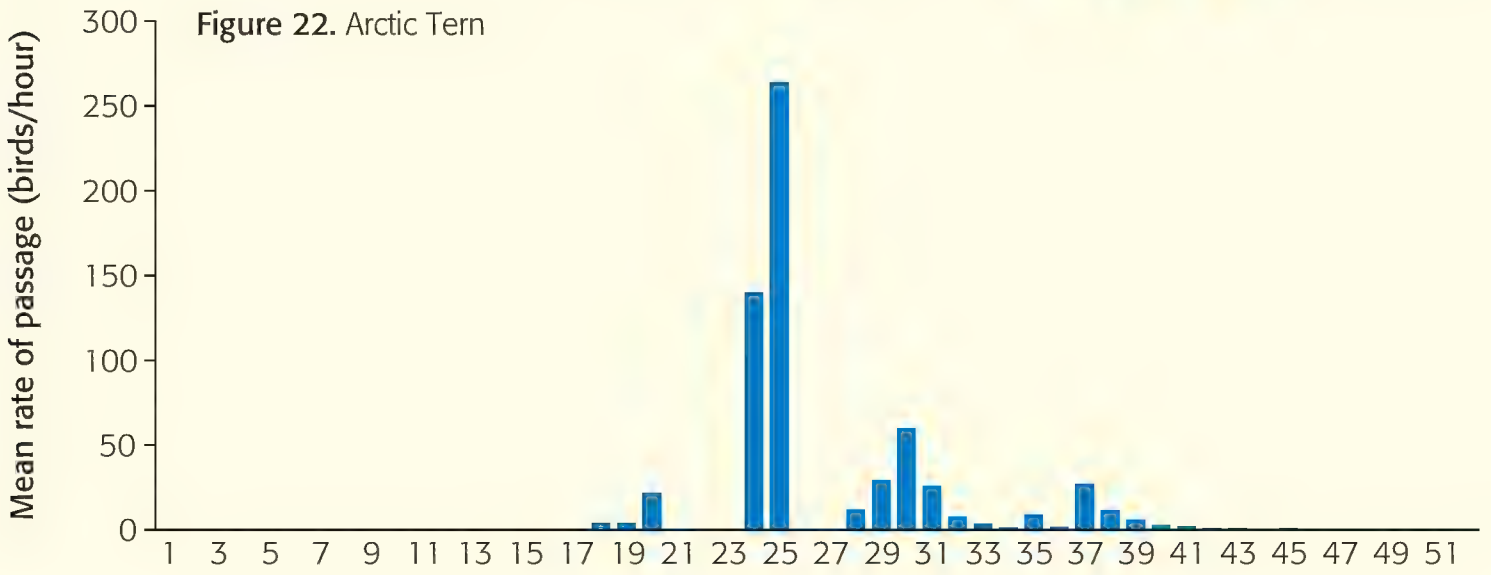


Figure 22. Arctic Tern



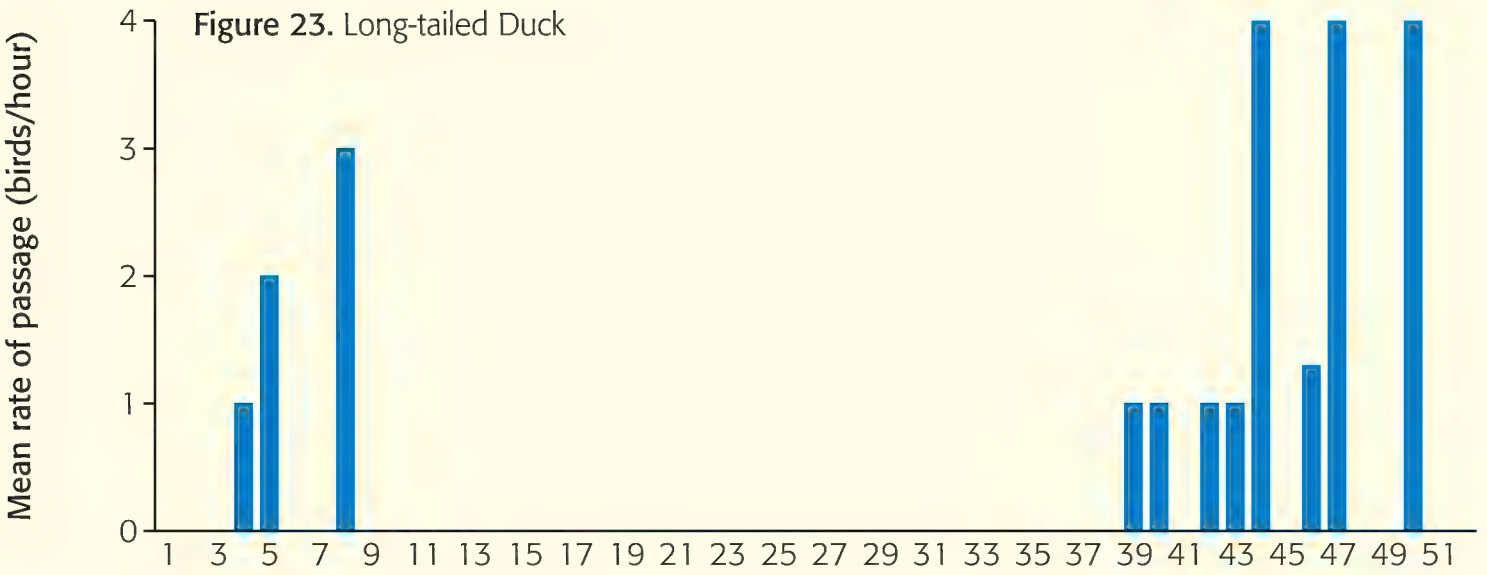


Figure 23. Long-tailed Duck

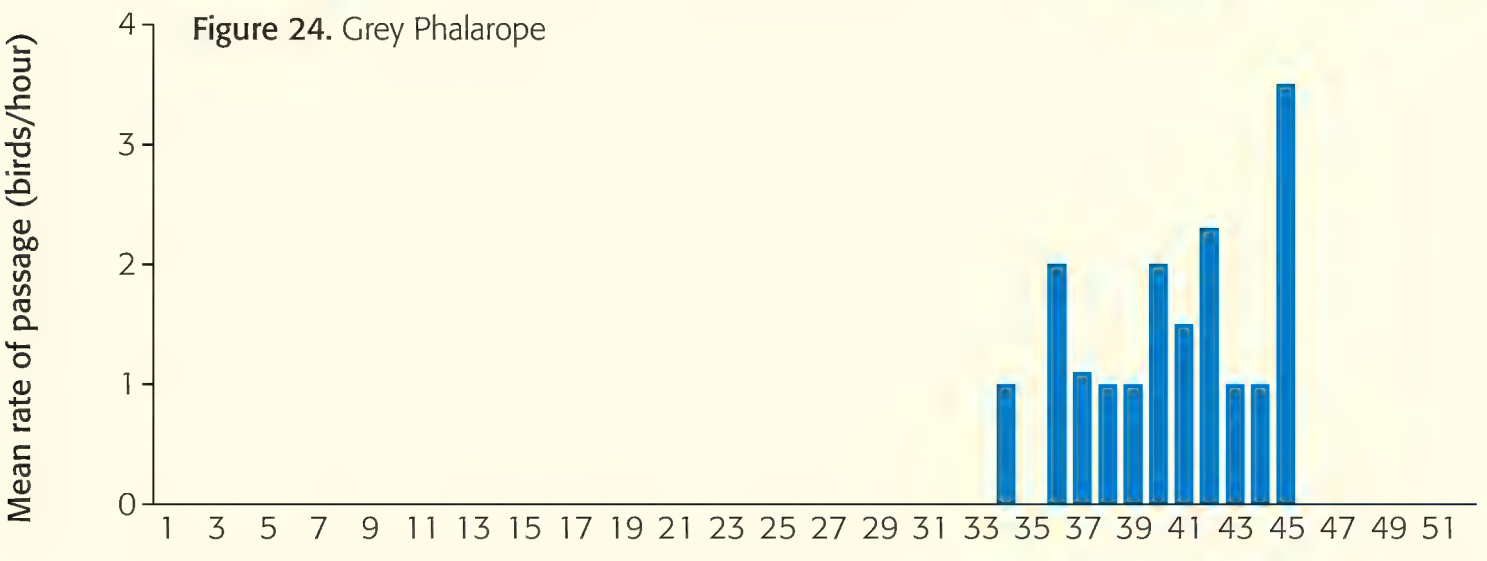


Figure 24. Grey Phalarope

11 August (2010) and 11 November (2008). A single adult Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* headed west off Aird on 9 August 2006 during a large passage of Kittiwakes.

Terns

Arctic Terns were by far the most numerous tern on seawatches mostly recorded from early May to late October (Figure 22) with a particularly late bird off Aird on 11 November 2008. Highest numbers were recorded in June involving feeding movements of local birds, as the island held some 200–600 breeding pairs during the period, together with an unusually large annual congregation of up to 1,600 2cy birds in July (Bowler 2019). Numbers on autumn passage were low in Scottish terms, as they are in the Outer Hebrides (Rabbits 2019), reflecting the fact that birds from Shetland and Orkney tend to move directly south into the North Sea or fly well offshore in the Atlantic (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Little Terns *Sternula albifrons* were only recorded on three occasions. Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* were only recorded twice. Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* was recorded only once.

Ducks and Grey Phalarope

Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis* occurred in small numbers in the winter months between 2 October (2017) and 22 February (2017) (Figure 23). Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* were recorded on nine occasions between 29 August (2008) and 26 January (2017) with one spring record of three. Scaup *Aythya marila* were recorded on three occasions and always in groups of six to seven birds. Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* were recorded in small numbers near annually in autumn (Figure 24) between 24 August (2005) and 11 November (2008).

Continued seawatches on Tiree will no doubt shed further light on patterns of seabird movements around the island and indeed along the Scottish West Coast. To this end, additional observer coverage on the island is always most welcome.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Clive McKay and Alan Leitch for sharing their experiences of seawatching locations on Tiree. Grateful thanks to all observers who have recorded and submitted their bird records from Tiree and to the work of BBRC, SBRC and ABRC. Thanks also to helpful comments on an earlier draft from Tristan ap Rheinallt, Jim Dickson, Andy Robinson, Jeremy Wilson and an anonymous referee.

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BORDERS BIRD REPORT FOR 2018

The *Borders Bird Report* for 2018 will be available for purchase from early September. The 191-page report covers summaries of the 209 species recorded during the year, including the first Lesser Yellowlegs for Borders. Included in the report are an account of the Lesser Yellowlegs find, an account of the finding of a Melodious Warbler at St Abb's Head (the second for Borders), a report on the first fully co-ordinated survey of breeding seabirds along the Berwickshire coast since Seabird 2000 and a brief outline of some of the findings of Breeding Bird Surveys in SE Scotland between 1994 and 2017. Also included is the ringing report for Borders.

The report is illustrated with colour photographs taken by local birders and is generously supported by a graphs depicting trends of records in recent years.

Copies are available from **Malcolm Ross, 24 Netherbank, Galashiels, TD1 3DH** and are £10 plus £2 P&P. Cheques should be made payable to 'SOC Borders Branch'. Alternatively, copies are available at Waterston House.

Plate 195. Tengmalm's Owl, Bixter, Shetland, February 2019. © *Hugh Harrop*

Tengmalm's Owl at Bixter and Tresta, February–April 2019 – 5th record for Shetland

H. HARROP

On the morning of 19 February 2019, Erik and Jackie Moar noticed a small, grey owl sat in a pine tree just outside their bedroom window at their home in Tumblin, Bixter, Mainland Shetland. Not recognising the bird, Jackie took some photographs and posted them on her Facebook page.

I was heading out to the central Mainland to pick up some trail cameras we'd set out along the coast in January and on the way, I received a message from a friend of Jackie's to let me know there was an owl in a garden at Tumblin. Assuming it to be a Long-eared Owl, I messaged back to see if there were any images. About five minutes later, I got another message to say it was "some kind of small, speckly owl" and then, shortly after that, a screen-grab which stopped me in my tracks! I was looking at a picture of - yes - a Tengmalm's Owl!

I made contact with Jackie immediately to tell her what the bird was and the importance of their find. She was about to head to Lerwick and told me where her house was and more

Plates 196–198 (overleaf). Tengmalm's Owl, Tresta, Shetland, April 2019. © *Roger Riddington & Rory Tallack*

Plate 199. Jackie and Erik Moar (front right) with visiting birders, Bixter, Shetland, February 2019. © *John Coutts*

importantly where the bird was. She had an appointment to attend in Lerwick but in true Shetland spirit, kindly waited at the house. John and Dennis Coutts had seen the original Facebook post and arrived at Tumblin around the same time.

Jackie greeted us and invited us in to the house, where we were soon enjoying point-blank views of this pint-sized stunner through her bedroom window. The bird was sat a couple of metres off the ground, almost in full view. We put the news on the local grapevine and also called it in to Rare Bird Alert along with detailed instructions of the viewing arrangements that Jackie had kindly offered. Shortly after, the first local birders arrived at Tumblin and were enjoying lovely views of this stunning bird.

This is the fifth record of Tengmalm's Owl for Shetland, but the first since 1912. Previous records are:

1897: Scalloway, Mainland, female, found dead, 14 March, now at Shetland Museum.
1901: Sandsting, Mainland, female, shot, 5 November
1908: Unst, adult female, caught, 8 January
1912: Unst, caught, 23 January, kept alive until 19 February

Huge thanks go to Erik and Jackie on their incredible find and for the lovely welcome. Congratulations also to 'The Godfather' of Shetland birding, Dennis Coutts who has now seen every species of owl on the Scottish List (see pages 252–258). Well done, Sir!

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The bird was not seen at Tumblin on 20th, but was viewable there again on 21st and 23rd. It was not seen on 24th, but luckily was relocated a short distance away in a woodland edge at Lea Gardens, Tresta, Mainland on 25 February where it was seen daily to 2 March and then again on 10–13 April. Remarkably, it [presumably the same bird] was seen the next day at Valyie, Norwick, Unst, but not thereafter. We can only hope it made its way back to Northern Europe safely.

We can only speculate, but it seems highly likely [there is a possibility that] this could be the bird photographed sitting on a disused toilet in an outbuilding on Shapinsay, Orkney on 2 November 2018.

Tengmalm's Owl status in Scotland

This species breeds predominantly in dense coniferous forest across the boreal habitat zone of the Northern Hemisphere, and in Europe also in lower density in mountainous regions of Central and Eastern Europe and the Pyrenees. It is partially migratory, particularly in the north of its range, with males generally sedentary and females/young birds dispersing up to 500 km from their breeding areas.

There have been 52 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2017 (but only seven since 1950), with 12 of these in Scotland (last in 1986). The first Scottish record was one caught at Cramond Island, Lothian in December 1860, with most since on the Northern Isles (Shetland 1897, 1901, 1908 and 1912, and Orkney 1959/60, 1961, two in 1980 and 1986) except for a female near Peterhead, North-east Scotland on 3 February 1886 and one found dead near Blairgowrie, Perthshire in February 1915. The geographical spread of records elsewhere in Britain extends from the east coast counties from Northumberland to Kent, and single records in Shropshire (1872), Cumbria (1876), Worcestershire (1901) and Northamptonshire (1902). There are no records from Wales or Ireland.

Most of the Scottish birds have been in late autumn or winter with find dates from 13 October to 14 March except for one on 1 May 1961 at Stromness, Mainland Orkney and one on Egilsay, Orkney of 31 May and 1 June 1986, with presumed same found dead (about three weeks decomposed) on 25 June at Glims Holm, Orkney. The find dates of birds elsewhere in Britain show a similar pattern from 11 October to 23 March, plus singles in Kent in May 1836 and Norfolk in July 1903. The vast majority of birds are not seen beyond their day of discovery except for individuals in Orkney in 1986 (2 days), in Orkney in 1959/60 (7 days) and in 1980 (8 days), and at Spurn, Yorkshire on 6–23 March 1983 (22 days) which could have been present since 28 January that year.

Plate 200. Tengmalm's Owl, Bixter, Shetland, February 2019. © *Hugh Harrop*

Seven owls in Shetland

D. COUTTS

At the end of 2018, I saw an image of a Tengmalm's Owl occupying a vacant toilet in Orkney - at an undisclosed site. The photo showed how Tengmalm's Owls can indeed look 'surprised'! Being the overall bird species most recorded in Shetland not on my county list, I hoped the Orkney owl might island-hop northwards. If it made it at least to Fair Isle, I could complete Shetland's set of seven owls. The odds did not seem good: the last of Shetland's four records was back in 1912. By contrast, Orkney appears to be quite a hotspot for Tengmalm's - with six since the 1950s.

Island-hopping certainly occurs with many species: a Magpie present on North Ronaldsay in 1987 did arrive on Fair Isle to become a Shetland 'mega', and is still our only county record. When I heard from Fair Isle about the Magpie, I was also told that the wartime pilot of the crashed Heinkel was due to visit the isle. So, I flew there hoping to 'kill two birds with one stone': tick off Magpie and photograph the pilot with wreckage of his Luftwaffe bomber. I found Heinz Thurz a super-interesting guy, delighted now to have made a soft landing on, as he said, "the beautiful island that saved my life". I dipped on the Magpie - it's a tick to look forward to.

On 19 February 2019, my son John emailed me an image of an unidentified owl photographed that morning by a lady at Tumblin, Bixter. Having seen nesting Tengmalm's Owls in Finland - I identified the bird and gasped. What seemed a

Plate 201. Dennis Coutts ready to 'ambush' his first Snowy Owl, Whalsay, Shetland, July 1964. © *Bobby Tulloch*

Plate 202. Tengmalm's Owl, Bixter, Shetland, February 2019. © *John Coutts*

long 20 minutes later, we were looking from the Tumblin house window into the nearest evergreen - there it was - an exquisite Tengmalm's Owl - my seventh owl species for Shetland! No wonder I was trembling. On this very same date 112 years ago Shetland's last Tengmalm's Owl was last seen alive on Unst. At first only Hugh Harrop, John and I were admiring the most welcome visitor, but this was soon to become Shetland's biggest-ever twitch, with hundreds of guys heading north. Quite a contrast with the Tengmalm's Owl in Orkney that was completely untwitched at the Copinsay lighthouse loo, or maybe this was the same bird?

What follows are some memories of my six other owls in Shetland with Long-eared Owl the most likely to be seen. In the 1960s, I recall finding a dozen wintering birds in a Scalloway garden. I also discovered breeding birds on nearby hillsides, where the old nests of Hooded

Plate 203. Young Long-eared Owl, near Scalloway, Shetland, June 1964. © *Dennis Coutts*

Plate 204. Long-eared Owls, Scalloway, Shetland, autumn 1968. © *Dennis Coutts*

Crows were used. Unfortunately, although the nests were hidden in deep heather, they were not safe; I remember firemen hosing down a heather fire 8 m from an incubating bird.

In an effort to tempt owls to a safer breeding site another season, I built a 'nest' of twigs in a sycamore at their favourite wintering garden in Scalloway. Unfortunately, noisy Hooded Crows occupied the nest and became quite unwelcome squatters. In due course, the adult birds were busy feeding four chicks whose upstretched gaping bills and bare spindly necks made them look like tulips swaying in the wind. Regrettably, as the brood's clamouring increased, sleep for the folk in the house under the trees decreased. After the chicks fledged, I pulled the nest down.

Short-eared Owl is a very rare breeder in Shetland, but a regular migrant. On Fair Isle, over 20 have been counted on an autumn day; on a hillside there I once saw a loose group of about eight birds. But my most vivid memory is of a single bird and how concerned I became about its sense of direction. I had boarded one of Fair Isle's older 'Good Shepherd' ferries at Grutness in a day of thick fog. At that time the ferry had no radar, let alone GPS. After we left Sumburgh Head, nothing could be seen but we knew where we were with the foghorn booming. Standing at the stern gazing into the ferry's wake, I expected an uneventful trip. Then out of the fog an owl appeared, flying straight towards the ferry, a Short-eared, with large staring yellow eyes. I thought it might land on the mast or wheelhouse; instead when only yards away, it veered sharp right heading due west. In only a few deep wingbeats, it disappeared into the gloom. On that course, at Shetland's latitude of 60°N, the first landfall is the south tip of Greenland. I did hope some inner instinct - or even the foghorn - would help the owl 'navigate' back to safety.

Barn Owls are rare in Shetland, eluding me during my first 30 years of birdwatching. Here, occurrences of continental Dark-breasted Barn Owls slightly out-number those of the typical British pale-breasted form. I've seen three continental owls, but only one pale bird - my first, on Whalsay. After a quick exit from a wedding I was photographing - with three pals, I caught the ferry. We scoured the area where the owl had been seen recently, but no luck. As it got nearer the departure time of the last ferry, we left the site but met the owl's original finder, Brian Marshall: "Four twitchers all happy?" Somehow, he'd just seen the bird. We did a quick U-turn - there it was - the ghostly owl gave us excellent views down to 10 m, hovering over boats at the beach, flew towards the kirk and back over the boats. Four relieved twitchers caught the ferry - just - and were indeed happy.

Plate 205. 'Dark-breasted Barn Owl', Reawick, Shetland, January 2005. © *Dennis Coutts*

In 2001, for my first Scops Owl, I had to twitch *out* of Fair Isle. Early on a May morning, the owl's finder, Jim Nicolson of Cunningsburgh had a surprise - he'd practically walked into the mini raptor dozing in his garden. From Fair Isle, there was no ferry that day and seats on both outward planes were fully booked. On spec, I tried my luck at the second plane and thanks to a last-minute no-show I got on. An hour later, I was scoping the Scops! In a small group, I watched for a while, noting the owl's upright stance, the mix of grey and brown plumage, the erect 'ears' and closed eyes. As daylight faded, it remained 'aloof' and motionless. Next morning, I decided to return to Fair Isle. On my way to the ferry I called along Cunningsburgh, but the Scops Owl hadn't been seen again.

Plate 206. Short-eared Owl, The Knab, Lerwick, Shetland, May 1999. © *Dennis Coutts*

Two years later, a Scops Owl was reported on Unst. I arrived there, found it perched on a roadside post, but it flew into a bush and 'disappeared' - the cryptic plumage merging with the bark of the bush's trunk. We'd never have discovered it there. I saw my third Scops Owl in 2006 at Swining, in a willow bush, only inches above a small burn. When a 'large' noisy Blackbird harassed it, I realized just how tiny Scops Owls are; earlier the Unst bird had shown me the species' flight and ability to vanish.

Plate 207. Scops Owl, Swining, Shetland, May 2006. © *Dennis Coutts*

In 1983, a Hawk Owl accounted for one of Shetland's earliest and biggest twitches. Angus Nicol phoned me saying a Hawk Owl was perched just outside his window near Dale golf course. Confident of his identification, he assured me its face was framed by 'black pillars'. When I got there, I saw the owl in flight, tail long like a Sparrowhawk's; it landed in a Sycamore close to a derelict building, an ideal viewpoint. The unconcerned owl could see me quite well as I clicked rapidly from where a window had once been. But I had problems: the owl's tree swaying in the wind, the poor light and a primitive f/8 mirror lens reminiscent of a 2lb. jam jar. Moreover, my 'fast' (!) 200 ISO film meant a shutter speed of 1/60th - all a recipe for blur. Luckily, by clicking at the end of each sway of the tree, I got some useable shots. The Hawk Owl stayed two days, but some visiting birders who dipped, did score a week later. They'd returned to Shetland when the owl was re-located at a remote croft on the island of Bressay. Shetland's only other record was in the 1860s - on Unst.

Plate 208. Hawk Owl 'posing', Dale golf course, Shetland, September 1983. © *Dennis Coutts*

Snowy Owls are my favourites, I saw my first on Whalsay in 1964. About 400 m away, this male bird looked like a tiny snowman, but when I photographed him at 12 m, he was magnificent. Bobby Tulloch had made it possible. He suggested that I should squat in a peat-cutting, he then hid me under two upturned wheelbarrows and built peat around the gaps (Plate 201). I poked my camera lens out, aiming it optimistically at a nearby peat stack. Bobby then took a wide detour around the owl, gently attempting to coax it my way. His 'ambush' idea paid off - the impressive white bird glided right on cue to the stack and I shot off three frames!

Three years later, on neighbouring Fetlar, Bobby found a Snowy Owl's nest with three eggs - their first recorded breeding in the wild in Britain. The event made front-page news - and Bobby an overnight celebrity. Meanwhile, the RSPB mounted a 24-hour guard in a hut overlooking the nest and with access hidden from the owls. George Waterston invited me to film the activities.

Hundreds of people came to Fetlar to enjoy viewing the Arctic visitors. I was allowed to walk to the nest and became the first person to see the first chick hatched. The tiny blind owlet lay with its chin cradled between two of six roundish white eggs. What a relief, had the Snowies failed it would have been such an anti-climax after our high hopes, efforts and all the publicity. I now set up my hide 80 yards from the nest and over a fortnight, Bobby moved in to 10 yards. Six chicks now occupied the nest, one egg failed to hatch.

By the time the hide was finally in its position, I'd photographed several weddings and was eager to swap brides for birds. At 06:00 hrs one fine morning, I met the warden on duty at the watch hut and he accompanied me to the hide. As we walked the female flew from the nest but the male glided in low over our heads barking at us. When I entered the hide the warden headed back to the hut and had gone only 100 m when the male flew back to his regular look-out post, a large rock. Minutes later the female returned to the nest, glanced briefly at my lens and became pre-occupied with the chicks.

Three hours later, the chicks' heads suddenly swayed from side to side excitedly. I pressed the ciné camera button - in a flash the male swept in clutching a small Rabbit! He transferred it from his talons to his bill - passed it to his mate in a quick tug-of-war - and left. He returned to his rock and remained there all day, doing little but ducking when Arctic Skuas dive-bombed only inches from his head.

Plate 209. Snowy Owl in Lerwick. Shetland, with Bobby Tulloch. The owl had landed exhausted on a trawler off Spitsbergen, and two months later was released on Fetlar. © *Dennis Coutts*

Plate 210. Hand-coloured black and white print of female Snowy Owl and chicks, Fetlar, Shetland, July 1967. *© Dennis Coutts*

I switched to a telephoto lens for close-ups of the female while she was distracted by the Rabbit. She raised the feathers that normally mask the bill so they bristled like whiskers, and with her head down, began to rip up the Rabbit. Pausing for a moment, she rolled her yellow eyes up to the lens with a drop-dead stare. That look combined with those whiskers reminded me of my old 'walrus-moustached' Grandpa! - a Greenland whaler back in the 1880s.

When the six chicks eventually dispersed from the nest, they were still covered in grey down. This enabled them to hide among the surrounding rocks, on hearing an adult's alarm call. Apart from the bare intertarsal joints, their legs were feathered white, like woolly socks. If they got up to scurry off, I had to laugh - the pink skin of 'heels' flashed through holes in their 'socks'! During September, five of the six fledged and by then resembled the female, although the white feathers were more heavily barred with brown. This was the most successful of the Snowy Owls' nine breeding seasons on Fetlar.

I am ever grateful to George Waterston for entrusting me with this once-in-a-lifetime assignment. The resulting 16-mm film 'The Snowy Owls of Fetlar', featured in the RSPB's regular winter shows and was also shown on television. A German I had met previously on Fetlar phoned me after seeing it on TV in Berlin!

Those are my seven Shetland owls - will there ever be eight? There are no records here of Tawny or Little Owls - they don't seem to wander much. For them, I've had to do the wandering, to mainland Scotland. However, if Pale-breasted and Dark-breasted Barn Owls were ever split - unlikely, but that would do it - an old rocking chair tick!

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Plate 211. Blue-winged Teal, Mellon Charles, Wester Ross, April 2019. © *Lee Gregory*

Blue-winged Teal, Mellon Charles, Aultbea, Wester Ross – third Highland record

R.L. MCMILLAN

Although I've been interested in birds for 60+ years, it is only really in the last 10 years and since moving to Skye, that I've become interested in listing. So, now I have active Skye and Highland lists, and more recently have been trying to improve my mediocre Scottish list by indulging in the occasional surreptitious twitch. Whilst this is enjoyable, it doesn't quite match the buzz of finding new birds, be it a Fork-tailed Flycatcher in Maine, a Blackpoll Warbler near our home in Elgol, Skye or even a wandering Jay to add to my Skye list. Though I had seen Blue-winged Teal in Canada, I had yet to see one in Scotland, so it was high on my wish list.

Monday 18 March 2019 was my 72nd birthday, and we had decided to go out for the day with my good lady choosing Gairloch, a two-hour excursion, though when you live remotely on the west coast, everywhere is a fair drive. I scanned Loch Ewe at Mellon Charles searching for the leucisitic Great Northern Diver which had recently been reported, but with no success. In Mellon Charles, there is a shallow reedy pool/lochan which had looked promising on a previous visit, so I decided to check it out. There is an access road and parking area nearby, providing an open view of the fringes of the lochan. As always, I was driving quietly with an eye on the water and saw the drake Blue-winged Teal with the naked eye before I had even stopped the car.

It was one of these eureka moments, and I suspect several unrepeatable expletives were uttered before I manoeuvred the vehicle into a position where I could see the bird clearly with binoculars. Drake Blue-winged Teal, with their white crescent-shaped markings on either side of a dark head and bill, are almost unmistakeable, even more so at distances of 30–40 m. There was little need to consult a field guide or take detailed notes. I have become an opportunist photographer for moments like this, and was

amazed to find that in the ensuing 45 minutes I rattled off nearly 500 images. Because the car was used as a hide, the bird behaved quite naturally, dabbling and surface feeding, at one stage down to 15 m before swimming to the far side of the lochan. There were other wildfowl on the loch including a female Shoveler, itself quite rare in the NW Highlands.

There is a WhatsApp group in Highland, so I posted the news on this and on Twitter. Al McNee was clearly poised, and came over from Inverness and managed to see the bird that evening, and there were several other birders on the following day. Amongst them was a twitcher from Somerset who had driven overnight to see the bird, now number 400 on his British list.

This is only the third record for Highland, with single drakes previously at Tarradale in August 1975, and at Munlochy Bay in 1996. Both stayed for only a day giving others little chance to connect with them. Like most of the NW Highlands, coverage by birders is very poor so it is difficult to speculate how long the Aultbea bird had been there prior to my visit.

At a stage in life, when it can sometimes be a challenge to remember what day it is, 18 March 2019 will long be etched in my memory, and I received more birthday greetings through Twitter than ever before. Hopefully there will be many days like it in the years ahead: I just have to keep on looking!

After the initial sighting at Mellon Charles the bird remained in the same area until at least 4 June. Although it was occasionally seen flying into the lochan with Mallards, as far as I know it was never actually observed away from the wee lochan. Throughout the period it was associating with a female Shoveler. Display was noted by several observers although as far as I know no mating was observed. It is worth mentioning that a female Shoveler in this part of the world is noteworthy in itself.

The Blue-winged Teal was seen by multiple observers throughout the period and observed almost daily. There were negative reports at Mellon Charles on 8 and 12 June.

Plate 212. Blue-winged Teal, Mellon Charles, Wester Ross, March 2019. © *Bob McMillan*

Plate 213. Blue-winged Teal, Mellon Charles, Wester Ross, March 2019. © *Bob McMillan*

Shortly after, a drake Blue-winged Teal was found at Douglas Water, Clyde on 12 June and I exchanged messages with the finder, Scott Black, on the assumption that it was the Mellon Charles bird which had moved south. The Douglas Water bird was in the company of three Teal. There were daily reports of that bird to 15 June and then confusingly, a report the same day at Frankfield Loch near Hogganfield Loch, Glasgow. There was initially some confusion as to whether it was the same bird commuting between Douglas Water and Frankfield but that was put to rest fairly quickly. The Douglas Water bird was noted to 24 June and again on 11 July, with the individual at Frankfield Loch still present on 27 July. It is not clear which, if either, of these birds relates to the sightings at Mellon Charles.

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Blue-winged Teal status in Scotland

This Nearctic duck breeds from SE Alaska eastwards past the southern edge of Hudson Bay to southern Newfoundland, and south to northern Nevada, northern New Mexico and across to Massachusetts. Some birds are present year-round in southern Texas to Mississippi and North Carolina, but the vast majority migrate to wintering areas from easternmost California and SW Arizona south into Mexico and Central America, and SE Texas to the Carolinas south through the Caribbean, to northern South America south to Peru and northern Brazil.

There have been 274 Blue-winged Teals (accepted individuals) in Britain to the end of 2017, with 61 of those in Scotland. The number of Scottish records was declining, with none in 1998–2003, but has been steady since 2004 with about 23 records, but this includes returning individuals in Clyde and Dumfries & Galloway, which would reduce this total to about 10 new individuals. The Scottish records continue to constitute 22% of the British total as was the case in 2004 (Forrester & Andrews, 2007). Many are only seen on the day of discovery, with several staying for up to 10 days, and exceptionally one in Dumfries & Galloway for 420 days from 2012 into 2013, and perhaps the same individual noted in Clyde for 169 days in 2012 and 167 days in 2013,

The geographical spread of Scottish records remains biased to the west and north with relatively few on the 'east side'. There are individuals in Shetland (8), Orkney (17), the Outer Hebrides (18), Highland (2), NE Scotland (4), Perth & Kinross (1), Argyll (4), Clyde (4), Dumfries & Galloway (5), Angus (1) and Lothian (2).

Plate 214. Black-winged Stilt, Heylipol, Tiree, Argyll, April 2019. © *Graham Todd*

Black-winged Stilt, Heylipol, Tiree, 16–18 April 2019 – first record for Argyll

J. BOWLER & G. TODD

The two small roadside pools just north of Heylipol Church in the middle of Tiree do not look particularly special and they frequently dry out completely in the summer. However, they have held more than their fair share of unusual birds over the years including Gull-billed Tern, Bonaparte's Gull, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Pectoral Sandpiper and Lapland Bunting to name but a few. They also regularly host scarcities such as Garganey, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint in spring, so they are always worth a passing check. Graham Todd did just that on the afternoon of 16 April 2019 and when he pulled his car in off the road, he couldn't quite believe his eyes, as a stunning Black-winged Stilt was busy feeding on the smaller northern pool!

I was out working in central Tiree when, at 14:30 hrs, I received a call from Graham on my mobile. His tones were hushed, as it transpired the bird was very close to the open window of his car and he was desperately trying not to flush it. However, I was still able to make out the words "Black-winged Stilt", to which I could only reply "you're joking aren't you?!" Graham confirmed that he wasn't joking, so I headed off immediately to the pools where I found Graham still parked up and the stilt obligingly still feeding busily on the smaller northern pool.

I watched the bird closely for some 30 minutes and took some photos and video. There could be no doubting the identification. The extremely

long pink legs, the needle-fine black bill and the largely white body plumage contrasting with the all blackish wings and mantle, all proclaimed the bird to be, quite remarkably given its location, a Black-winged Stilt. The extensive black on the crown and nape indicated it to be a male bird, whilst there were also distinct brown tints to the dark upperparts, particularly on the mantle and scapulars, suggesting it to be in its second calendar-year.

The stilt flew a few metres to the southern pool, so I crept out of my Land Rover to join Graham in his car for a congratulatory handshake and a chat about his amazing find. At the time, neither of us fully appreciated quite how rare the species was in a Scottish context, although we knew it was a first for both Tiree and Argyll. We left the bird still feeding on the pools at around 15:30 hrs. The pool was next to a public road with no risk of disturbance to other nesting species, so we put news of the bird out and phoned Jim Dickson, the Argyll bird recorder, who we knew would be keen to see it.

Graham returned to the pools that evening at around 19:20 hrs but the stilt was not present. He phoned me this news and we discussed the possibility that it might have left the island. I decided to check the nearby Loch a' Phuill, as previous rare waterbirds have found their way to this large rich machair loch having first turned up somewhere else on the island.

A thorough check of the northern shore at 20:00 hrs revealed the stilt, loosely associating with a mixed group of Oystercatchers and Lapwings amongst rocks at the edge of the loch. The bird mostly rested and preened but also picked around for food from time to time at the loch shore. I left it at 20:15 hrs; hopeful that it would still be around the following day.

The stilt was indeed back at the Heylipol pools when I checked them at 08:20 hrs the following morning and it was still there at 10:30 hrs when Graham checked them again. I relayed the good news to Jim, who by then was ensconced on the ferry to Tiree. Unfortunately, however, the

Plate 215. Black-winged Stilt with Gadwall, Heylipol, Tiree, Argyll, April 2019. © *John Bowler*

Plate 216. Black-winged Stilt, Heylipol, Tiree, Argyll, April 2019. © *Jim Dickson*

bird had gone missing by the time Jim reached the pools at midday and a frantic search of Loch a' Phuill and other adjacent wetlands failed to locate it. Jim spent the afternoon waiting by the pools and fortunately the stilt eventually returned at 16:00 hrs, allowing him time to watch and photograph the bird before he had to return to Scarinish for the ferry back to Oban.

The stilt was again present on the pools at 10:00 hrs on 18 April but by this time the water levels had clearly dropped, and the extent of open water had declined dramatically. I left the bird still feeding at 10:15 hrs, but it was not relocated on subsequent visits. I alerted birders on neighbouring islands that the stilt appeared to have left Tiree, but it was not picked up elsewhere. During its stay the bird became a bit

Plate 217. Black-winged Stilt, Heylipol, Tiree, Argyll, April 2019. © *John Bowler*

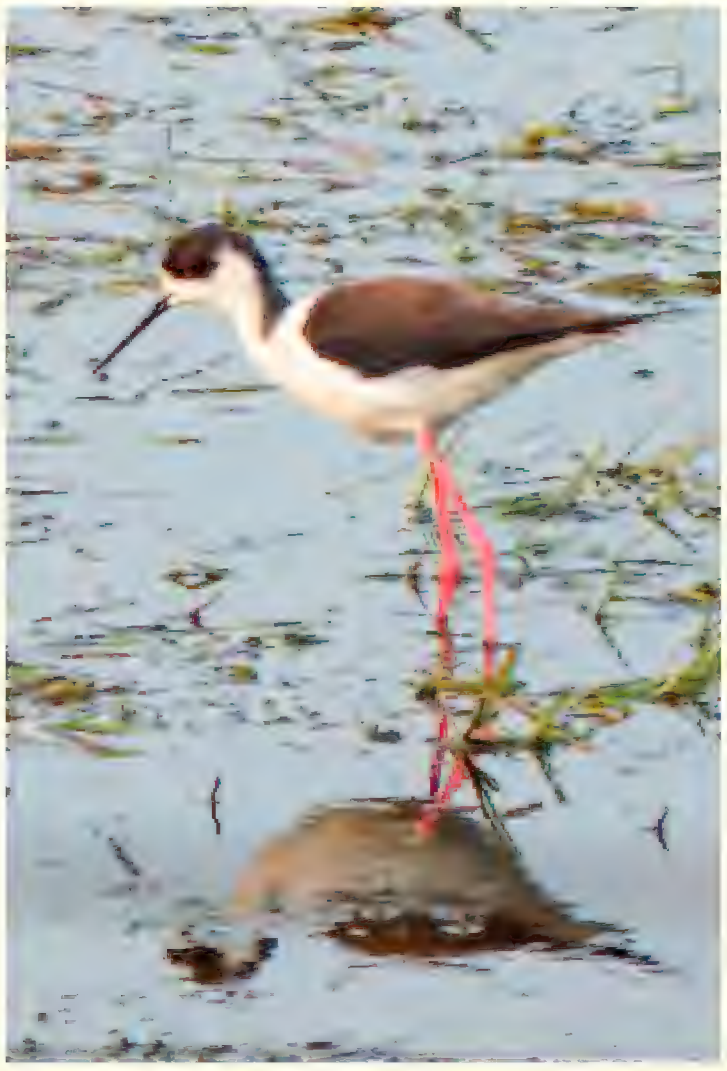

Plate 218. Black-winged Stilt, Heylipol, Tiree, Argyll, April 2019. © *John Bowler*

of an island celebrity featuring on local social media and being twitched by many local residents. One wonders how long it will be until the next one appears on Tiree.

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Black-winged Stilt status in Scotland

Black-winged Stilt breeds in small numbers in separated areas within NW Europe and has recently become an annual breeder in England, but the main part of its summer range is from Portugal east through the Mediterranean and southern and SE Europe and Turkey into SW and Central Russia. Other resident populations are found in NW Africa, Central & Southern Africa, the Middle East, India, Asia and most of Australasia. The European population is migratory and winters in southern Spain, and across Northern Africa.

A total of 529 accepted individuals were recorded in Britain to the end of 2016, with just ten of these in Scotland. Due to the large increase in numbers in Britain in recent decades the species was no longer considered to be a BBRC description species from the end of 2016. Historically, Black-winged Stilt first bred in Britain in 1945, with three pairs in Nottinghamshire raising four young. Further attempts occurred in Cambridgeshire in 1983, Norfolk in 1987 and Cheshire in 1993 (Brown & Grice 2005). In recent years breeding attempts have been annual in small numbers in southern Britain, though fledging has been limited in many cases by losses to ground predators.

The last Scottish record was of one seen on the Isle of May from 30 April to 4 May 2012 (Newell 2012). The other records are from Dumfries & Galloway (pre-1684 & 17 October 1920), Clyde (1850 & 5 October 1958), Sutherland (20 & 27 April 1953), North-east Scotland (14 October to 3 November 1984), Borders (26 May 1986), and the Outer Hebrides (two on South Uist on 5 July 1990).

The first two Scottish records do not have details of day or month when found, but the others are spread from April to October, with three in spring, two in summer and three in autumn. This differs from the pattern of records elsewhere in Britain where almost 80% of birds have been found from April to June, though the Tiree individual fits well with the latter.

The Tiree bird is only the 11th individual to be found in Scotland. It was part of an annual influx into Britain and Ireland in spring 2019, involving up to 35 birds, discovered between 12 April and 25 July, with all other sightings confined to England south of a line from Cambridgeshire to Somerset/Dorset. The majority (over 80%) of occurrences in Britain since 1950 have been from SW England, SE England and East Anglia, with fewer than 10% noted north of a line from the Mersey to the Humber.

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Plate 219. Mourning Dove, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, April 2019. © *Simon Davies*

Mourning Dove, North Ronaldsay, 29 April 2019 – first Orkney record

S.J. DAVIES

We were getting ready for serving dinner for the guests at the Obs after a stunning day, calm and sunny with a nice sprinkling of birds across the island, everyone was relaxed and content. At 18:00 hrs, a message came through on our island WhatsApp news group from Alex Wright, consisting of a very blurry photo of some kind of dove sat on the railings by the lighthouse. It had been taken earlier by Helen Galland and she was asking what it was.

I stared at the photo for several minutes trying to see beyond the blur, it was difficult to get a sense of size but the bird's colour was intriguing and you could make out some spots on the closed wing which naturally was slightly suggestive. George Gay chimed in from off-island, suggesting that maybe we should go and look for it! Toby Green who was visiting with his Heatherlea tour group was also uncommitted and like me seemed reluctant to head up to the lighthouse - maybe after tea!

It was within minutes of being dismissed as a dodgy picture of a Collared Dove (which, in hind-sight seems ridiculous!) when Pete Donnelly phoned the Obs talking about a funny dove at the lighthouse. At least for the first few minutes as I was talking to him, I was assuming that he was talking about the same photo that I had seen on my phone but suddenly the penny dropped. He was actually talking about the bird because he was actually watching it! He had been working at the lighthouse and found it independently and not even seen the photograph, now things became a bit more urgent as he said it was definitely not a Collared Dove, too small with those wonderful spots on the wings but he wasn't 100% on what it was.

Right, that was it, I ran into the bar told Alison Duncan who was cooking dinner and Toby with his tour group and bolted out of the door to race up to the lighthouse. When I got there the bird was just there sitting on the grass in front of the café, a mere 10 m in front of Pete, lounging against his Land Rover (Pete, not the dove), one look was enough for me - it was a Mourning Dove!

Description

A small dove, slimmer and around two-thirds of the bulk of a Collared Dove. Long and attenuated shape, even when perched and fluffed up the long wings and tail gave it a distinctive sloping wedge-shape. Light brown upperparts. Light brownish underparts but with a pinkish/orangey/peachy tinge, especially in the bright, strong sunshine. Obvious, large black oval spots on the tertials and inner coverts, obvious and clear even when at rest. Light grey top of the head extending down the nape and slightly round the neck to form an indistinct neck patch to blend into the light brownish mantle, contrasting with the peachy/orange face. Pale bluish/white eye ring. Black bill. Bright, iridescent purple neck patches, usually hidden but occasionally flashed them when seen head on with a slightly extended neck which, when combined with the bright tones to the body and face and greyish top of the head could point to it being a male. Deep pinkish legs.

Alison, Toby and his birding group were not far behind and we were soon enjoying point-blank views in the glorious evening sunshine, a very unexpected but brilliant moment especially with the weeks of south-easterly winds we've just experienced, a Nearctic land bird just wasn't on our radar. We surmised; it could have come in along the northern edge of Storm Hannah which had just swept across the UK - although we hadn't seen any of the strong winds that affected the southern UK. The bird looked very tired and seemed unwilling to move anywhere apart from the little square of grass it was on, as it was right in the open, very exposed, it seemed like it had just arrived from a long flight - or so you always tell yourself.

We left after a while to have dinner and drinks but I came back up with more folk wanting to see it just before dusk, there was no sign however. The area was searched thoroughly the following day, it was a clear, calm night I suppose but it didn't seem keen to move on when it was last seen but what do I know! A fantastic bird, two years to the day after the Red-winged Blackbird appeared!

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Mourning Dove status in Scotland

This is a common Nearctic species, resident from SW and easternmost Canada south from Nova Scotia and throughout the USA and with an additional summer breeding range north to southern Alberta and eastwards through southern Ontario and Quebec to Newfoundland. This population is wholly migratory, wintering within the resident range, and is presumably the source of vagrants in the Western Palearctic.

There have been four accepted records of Mourning Dove in Britain to the end of 2017, all in Scotland:

1999: Outer Hebrides first-winter, Carinish, North Uist, 13–15 November
2007: Outer Hebrides first-winter, Carnach, North Uist, 20 October to 7 November
2013: Highland one, Kinloch, Rum, 28 October to 3 November
2015: Shetland juvenile, Lerwick, Mainland, 20 December to 14 January 2016

There is a prior record of a moribund individual discovered on the Calf of Man, Isle of Man, on 31 October 1989, sadly found dead the next morning, but records from the Isle of Man are not normally included in the British List. There are also two records from Ireland: Inishbofin, Co. Galway, 2–15 November 2007 and Garinish, Co. Cork, 25 October.

The North Ronaldsay individual is therefore the first spring record of the species in the British Isles, though there have been spring birds in continental Europe in Germany (4 May 2008), Denmark (19–21 May 2008) and Sweden (3–19 June 2001). The longest stay by any of the British birds is 26 days.

Plate 220. Purple Heron, Bolnabodach, Barra, Outer Hebrides, June 2019. © *Bob McMillan*

Purple Heron, Bolnabodach, Barra, May–June 2019 – fifth Outer Hebrides record

K. LYON

Even being on Barra was a something of a minor miracle. In October 2018, I had arranged with my friend, Ian Ricketts, to come over to Barra in the spring to see Corncrake, a species that I had not seen for many years. I was also keen to see White-tailed Eagle which Ian had told me fly in front of his house on a daily basis. However, in late November I was given the news that I had about six months to live following a diagnosis of terminal stomach cancer. I remember telling him 'I probably won't make it…lar'

By the middle of May, I was still feeling well enough to travel. Just a little matter of a seven-hour drive from Derby to Oban and then the ferry that on that particular day went via Coll and Tiree. I arrived on Barra on 15 May.

By that evening I had seen Corncrake. Very happy but very tired, I declined the offer to be up at 06:00 hrs the next morning. Ian was going to go birding at the north end of the island and Bruce Taylor, who I had not yet met, was going south.

I awoke just before 09:00 hrs to sunlight streaming through my windows. Dressed in my pyjamas and wearing slippers, I picked up my binoculars and cigarettes and ventured outside onto the patio and surveyed the horizon. The Uists to the north were etched sharply on the skyline and to the south, The Minch, calm, serene and blue. Below me was a small loch, which I was to find out later was called Loch an Ali.

Just after I lit my first fag of the day, I noticed a large dark bird flying towards the loch. I couldn't

believe my luck as I was lifting my binoculars and thinking that within 18 hours on being on Barra, I had seen both target species. Corncrake last night, and now White-tailed Eagle. Focusing on the bird, I immediately realised that it was not an eagle. My heart sank for a moment, then a sudden realisation. 'Oh! Hang on a minute.'

I phoned Ian. He was driving. "Lar. There's a Purple Heron in front of your house!" I could tell by the stream of abuse he didn't immediately believe me. Eventually, he realised I was not joking. What seemed like only a minute or two later another birder suddenly appeared; Bruce Taylor had been contacted by Ian. I explained where it had gone down and that I could not see it at that moment. He left to get Kathy, his wife. I then heard a car screeching to a halt and Ian appeared. We waited a few minutes till Bruce and Kathy joined us again before planning our next move.

We decided to walk down the south-western side of the loch. From there we could see the area where I thought it had gone down. I was right. Ian and Bruce immediately picked it up on the bank and in full view. We watched it for a few minutes before it flew across the loch and sat high up in a tree that was on the opposite side of the loch. It stayed there for about half hour before dropping into the reeds. Jubilant, we turned around and went for breakfast.

The Purple Heron stayed on the loch from 16–26 May. It then reappeared on 9 June for a couple of days after I'd left the island before apparently leaving again.

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Purple Heron status in Scotland

This species breeds in large, shallow wetlands with extensive reed cover across Europe from the Netherlands south to northern Morocco and Algeria, and eastwards through central Europe and the Mediterranean to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran, with other populations on Cape Verde, in Africa and South & East Asia. The European population is entirely migratory with birds wintering in Africa south of the Sahara and from Sudan through east Central Africa to South Africa, with a few overwintering in Egypt.

Plate 221. Purple Heron, Bolnabodach, Barra, Outer Hebrides, June 2019. © *John Nadin*

There were at least 425 individuals recorded in Britain to the end of 1982, such that it was no longer classed as a BBRC description species from the start of 1983. It has been confirmed to have bred in Britain - at Dungeness RSPB Reserve, Kent (Holling 2012), but has not followed the lead of several of its European cousins in colonising Britain in recent decades. There had been at least 88 individuals recorded in Britain up to the end of 1957 (Naylor 1996), and there have been a further 1,052 birds officially recorded up to the end of 2016 (White & Kehoe 2018). It is therefore somewhat surprising that there have only been 27 accepted records in Scotland to the end of 2017, where it remains a true rarity.

The Scottish records are distributed as follows: Shetland (1977, 1981, 2011); Fair Isle (1965, 1969, 1970); Orkney (1980, 1982); Outer Hebrides (1980, 1992, 1997, 2011); Caithness (1907); Moray & Nairn (2011); NE Scotland (1872, 1992, 1996); Fife (2011); Lothian (1872; 1982; 1998; 2017), Borders (1917; 1999); Clyde (1995); Ayrshire (2002) and Dumfries & Galloway (1973). Most have been at locations close to the coast, and over half in northern and western areas - a pattern seen with other species which overshoot their NW European breeding areas in spring.

Elsewhere in Britain there is a strong SE bias to records, with Norfolk, Suffolk and Kent accounting for over a third of spring records and over 40% of the records in autumn. This suggests most birds probably originate as overshoots from The Netherlands and NE France breeding populations or as dispersing post-breeding birds, with others from Southern Europe arriving in the SW of England and Wales in spring (over 20% of total) and autumn (over 10%).

Almost 70% of British records have been in spring, with a notable peak in May. The remaining records are spread from late July to mid-October with isolated records in February and November. The Scottish records mirror that pattern almost exactly, with seven in April, eight in May and four in June [70%, extreme dates 6 Apr–28 Jun], then a discrete gap before two in August, three in September and three in October [extreme dates 1 Sep–21 Oct].

The first three Scottish records were shot on the find date, and twelve subsequent records have only been seen on the day of discovery. Seven were present for less than a week, two for eight days, one for nine, one over 15 days [but only reported twice in that time], and one on Fair Isle on 2–31 May 1969 is the longest stayer at 30 days. This bird was also notable in that it had been ringed as a nestling two years earlier in the Netherlands. The Barra individual would have the second longest period of occurrence. Elsewhere in Britain there have been many longer staying birds, with birds lingering in wetland habitats for months after initial discovery, though often proving very elusive.

Plate 222. Purple Heron, Bolnabodach, Barra, Outer Hebrides, June 2019. © *John Nadin*

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Plate 223. Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, Argyll, May 2019. © *John Bowler*

Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, 17–27 May 2019 – the third record for Argyll

J. BOWLER

Gull-billed Tern has long been a 'bogey bird' of mine on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, where I have been based as RSPB Island Officer since 2001. The first Gull-billed Tern for Argyll spent four long days in the Crossapol-Heylipol area of Tiree from at least 29 September to 2 October 2008 (McKee 2010). Unfortunately, I was on sabbatical on Tristan da Cunha at the time, so was unable to see, or indeed have had the chance to find, this bird. Amazingly, a second Gull-billed Tern was found on a small pool near Heylipol church, Tiree on 25 April 2010 by Ian Simms and Robin Ward, but again I missed this bird because I was on secondment in Syria at the time. Other new Tiree birds missed during my rare absences from the island at migration times have slowly come my way over the years. However, my chances of seeing another Gull-billed Tern on the island seemed slim, knowing that this species remains a major Scottish rarity.

On 17 May 2019, having just completed my monitoring work on the breeding seabirds at Ceann a' Mhara, I decided to check the adjacent site of Loch a' Phuill for its breeding birds and the chance of some migrants. Water levels were high, so there was little mud to attract passage waders, but I checked the shoreline in any case for breeding waders and ducks. At around 13:50 hrs a rather chunky-looking, black-capped tern flew south down the edge of the loch at about 15 m height. It was clearly larger and sturdier looking than the adjacent Arctic Terns and flew with steadier beats of long but rather broad-based wings. I assumed it was going to be a Sandwich Tern, but when I lifted my bins, instead I could see a rather chunky and relatively short all-black bill, a black crestless cap, a rather striking black wedge in the primaries and a concolourous pale grey rump and tail. It was an adult Gull-billed Tern!

Plate 224. Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, Argyll, May 2019. © *John Bowler*

Panic set in, as having singularly failed to photograph a Greater Yellowlegs at almost exactly the same location the previous month, I was desperate to obtain some photographic evidence of this bird. It had passed towards the SW corner of the loch flying quite high but occasionally dipping down to feed on insects above the surface of the water and adjacent machair. Fortunately, the bird soon flew back up past me again heading north and I fired off some shots. Attempts to zoom in on the bird ended up with blurred out-of-focus shots but a wider angle produced some reasonable record shots (see Plates 223–227). I watched the bird for the following 25 minutes and took more photos whenever it came closer to my position until it drifted high to the NW over Barrapol and did not return.

Very happy to have finally caught up with a Gull-billed Tern on Tiree, I put the news out of the bird and assumed it would not be seen again, as it was absent from the loch during a check that evening. However, at 06:28 hrs on 20 May, whilst out doing an early morning breeding

Plate 225. Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, Argyll, May 2019. © *Christian Verstraete*

Plates 226–227. Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, Argyll, May 2019. © *John Bowler*

wader survey in the centre of the island, the Gull-billed Tern appeared above me, again dip-feeding for insects over open water and adjacent wetlands. I watched it for a further 25 minutes or so as it seemed to follow me around, and I took some closer shots, albeit in low light, until it finally headed off east towards Baugh.

Bizarrely, later the same day at 13:05 hrs, I bumped into the bird again at Loch Riaghain in the east of the island whilst conducting my monthly WeBS count there. The bird then remained faithful to this large shallow loch, patrolling quite high around the loch and dip-feeding for insects above, and sometimes at, its surface. I last saw it there on the afternoon of 27 May and two other birders (Christian Verstraete and Graham Todd) were able to twitch it there on the intervening days. I did not look for it on 28 May, but it was certainly absent from the loch on 29 May and was not seen again.

All in all, this was a real case of third-time lucky for me! Remarkably, of the Scottish records of Gull-billed Tern to date, three have now been from the small west coast island of Tiree.

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Reference

McKee, M. 2010. Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, Argyll, 29 September to 2 October 2008 - the first Argyll record. *Scottish Birds* 30(1): 76–78.

Gull-billed Tern status in Scotland

There have been 15 previous accepted records of Gull-billed Tern in Scotland, the most recent being the individual seen at Belhaven, Lothian and Kinneil, Upper Forth, in late May and June 2016. A full status summary was given with the write-up for that occurrence - Scottish Birds *36(3): 273–276.*

Plate 228. Red-flanked Bluetail, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2019. © *Calum Scott*

Red-flanked Bluetail, North Ronaldsay, 24 May 2019 – fifth spring record in Scotland

C.D. SCOTT & P.E. HALES

In recent years, both Patricia and my own attention has been drawn to the Orkney Islands, a place where we could experience both finding our own birds, and add a few new Scottish islands to our lists also.

The first week had seen us on the glorious Papa Westray, or at least it looked and felt glorious in the wall to wall sunshine! However, thanks to the weather migration was rather slow, this despite a stunning start to the week with a close inshore summer plumaged White-billed Diver on the first full day! By the end of the week a male Pied Flycatcher along with two Spotted Flycatchers had started to give us hope though.

Upon arrival on North Ronaldsay on our second week, we hastily twitched a group of five Dotterel, before our fantastic evening meal was soon interrupted at the observatory with the news of an Eastern Subalpine Warbler that had flown through an open door leading into the bar. Was it pished in I wonder?

After a day or so the weather soon turned to low cloud and rain from the east, fantastic Bluethroat weather, a species I had hoped to encounter for my find list! Several good species soon turned up, including indeed Bluethroat (although not self-found), but also Icterine Warbler, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler, giving all present on the island a good Scandinavian flavour to the week.

A stunning male Rosefinch which we found midweek seemed to be our best bird of the week, and by our last full day on 24 May things had quietened down significantly. This was largely due to the fact that the wind by now had switched round to the NW coupled with rain, accompanied by a general clear-out of migrants.

Despite this, a jaunt up to the very north of the island on this date had given us Garden Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Lesser Whitethroat, indicating that at least some new birds had perhaps arrived. It kept our hopes alive for a good bird on the final day. By late afternoon though, after much searching, we were both weary and tired, the previous two weeks efforts on Orkney having clearly sapped our energy by this point. Despite this we decided to give the cover of Holland House gardens yet another try, a place we had made a habit of visiting frequently each day.

Upon arriving at Holland House at 16:43 hrs, I was immediately aware of a constant, rather high-pitched call that I didn't recognise coming from the large ornamental pampas grass tussocks that sat in the NE of the garden. Thinking this call sounded like some kind of fledgling perhaps, or even a strange warbler, I told Patricia of my thoughts and that I was going in after the stranger to check it out. As soon as I started to walk in-between the two clumps of grasses (that towered above my head) a small bird hopped up onto one of the stems about a foot or so above the ground in front of me. Raising my bins I was delighted to see a chat with its back to me. With only a brownish looking head & mantle visible, as well as a glimpse of orangey flanks I initially thought of a first-summer male Redstart, a species Patricia had still to see well. I immediately alerted her to the bird, but as I did so it flew off over the nearby wall with what looked like a dark tail rather than the expected red one!! In an instant the dynamics changed, the orange flanks and a dark tail meant that suddenly the realisation came screaming out of my head and I screamed out to Patricia "NO, THAT WAS A BLUETAIL!!!!! I AM SURE IT WAS!" or words to that effect!

Plate 229. Red-flanked Bluetail, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2019. © *Calum Scott*

Plates 230–231. Red-flanked Bluetail, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2019. © *Calum Scott*

This left me in a quandary as I now knew what the bird was, but at this stage I had not even seen its tail well enough, or indeed even any of the other salient features to even claim such a bird of this magnitude! Autumn birds are rare enough, but this was spring! I knew that the observatory staff were out in force looking for wader nests just around the corner, and so thought about alerting them at this stage to the bird. However, the fact that all I had seen was a chat species with a brownish back, dark tail and a hint of orange on the flanks had me soon dispelling this. There was no way I was going to make such a call on such a fleeting glimpse! We needed to quickly relocate it, and I cursed myself as we tried to do so!

A quick search on the other side of the wall revealed nothing, cue more cursing! We then went back to the initial spot, and were delighted to find the bird perched on a guy rope of one of the Holland House mist nests. This time I remained calm and gathered all the salient features of the bird including the size and shape of the bird along with a cobalt blue tail, a slight paler supercillium, a pale eye-ring, orange flanks, off white breast and belly, along with a pure white throat clearly demarcated from the rest of the underparts by a grey surround.

I then immediately turned my attention on getting others on the island onto the bird, so I sent out a few Whatsapp messages out to the island birders. However, a combination of still shaking from the find, a lack of reading glasses and auto-correct predictive text meant that a series of interesting messages went out! Fortunately, they got the gist of the message and soon appeared for great views. The nets were soon unfurled and within a short space of time the bird was trapped.

In the hand, the bird was aged/sexed as a first-summer female by the Obs staff. It was not seen the following day

Description

Size and shape: similar in size and shape to a Robin. **Upperparts:**Upperparts, including head, mantle, upper rump and wings wholly brownish-olive. The dark eye was large with a pale eye-ring. A very indistinct pale supercilium ran from

over the bill to the eye but barely beyond. The lower rump and tail were a lovely cobalt blue. **Underparts:** The throat was white, almost ivory white even, which was sharply demarcated by a grey surround from the off-white underparts. When seen head on this throat patch stood out extremely well. The flanks were orange. **Bare parts:** the bill was all black, as were the legs.

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Red-flanked Bluetail status in Scotland

This Palearctic species breeds in northernmost Europe with isolated populations in north-westernmost Russia and adjacent parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland and then more solidly eastwards from the Ural Mountains, central Russia and northern Mongolia and China east to the Sea of Okhotsk and Kamchatka, Sakhalin, northern Japan and North Korea. The entire population is migratory, with European birds migrating east before heading south to wintering areas in southern Japan and Korea and SE China, Laos, Vietnam and easternmost Thailand and Cambodia.

There have been 184 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2016, with 71 of those in Scotland. A marked increase in records in the last two decades has been notable, believed to be due to the extension of its breeding range into NE Scandinavia, Finland and NW European Russia. Consequently, it is no longer classed as a BBRC description species from the start of January 2017 [now an SBRC description species]. There have been three further accepted records in Scotland in 2017.

The first Scottish record is of one shot near Skaw, Whalsay, Shetland on 7 October 1947, with no further birds found in Scotland until the 1970s, with birds on Fetlar, Shetland in 1971, the Isle of May in 1975 and Fife Ness, Fife in 1976. The 1980s provided just two records - on Fair Isle in 1981 and 1984, and the 1990s only four - Fair Isle in 1993, at Foveran, NE Scotland in 1998 and Scatness, Mainland Shetland and St. Abbs, Borders in 1999. Thereafter there were 15 in the 2000s, and a huge rise to 49 records in the period 2010–17. There were a remarkable 13 birds in 2010 alone, and 12 in 2016.

The Scottish records show a large bias (70%) to the Northern Isles, with 33 on Shetland, 17 on Fair Isle and 10 on Orkney. There are just single records from the Outer Hebrides (Lewis 2012), Caithness (Wick 2017), Highland (Tarbat Ness 2016), NE Scotland (Foveran 1998), the Isle of May (1975) and Lothian (Scoughall 2010), but mainland Fife has produced five records - all at Crail/Fife Ness (1976, 2003, 2010, 2013 & 2016) and Borders three records - all at St. Abb's Head (1999, 2010 & 2016). Elsewhere in Britain records show a strong bias to east coast counties, particularly, Norfolk, Suffolk and Yorkshire, and to a lesser extent the south coast counties, with further records in Cheshire, Leicestershire, Wiltshire, Anglesey/Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire.

A massive 94% of Scottish records (to end 2017) have occurred in autumn, with 18 in September, 46 in October and three in November, with find dates between 19 September and 19 November. By contrast, there have been just four previous records in spring - on Fetlar, Shetland on 31 May and 1 June 1971, on Out Skerries, Shetland on 2–3 April 2007, at Uigen, Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 31 March to 7 April and on Fair Isle on 30 March & 5 April 2014. The 2018 North Ronaldsay would group with this select band. This pattern mirrors that elsewhere in Britain, where the autumn records all fall within the Scottish find dates and there have been only three additional spring records - Yorkshire in 2007, Norfolk in 2013 and Gloucestershire/Wiltshire in 2014

The majority of Scottish records (58%) have only been present on the day of discovery, with only three individuals remaining more than four days - the Lewis bird of 2012 (8 days), one on Fair Isle in spring 2014 (7 days) and one at Geosetter, Mainland, Shetland on 3–17 November 2014 (15 days). Elsewhere in Britain, the lengths of stay follow a very similar pattern, plus four remaining eight days, one for nine, two for 10, one for 11 (Spurn, Yorkshire on 17–27 October 2009), one for 12 (Sandwich Bay, Kent on 20–31 October 2015) and with the longest-stayer being the bird in the Shire Valley (Gloucs/Wilts) on 3 February to 9 March 2014 (35 days).

Plate 232. Great Spotted Cuckoo, Iona, Argyll, June 2019. © *Philip Higginson*

Great Spotted Cuckoo, Iona, Argyll, 23–26 June 2019 – the second Scottish record

J.M. DICKSON

The small inner Hebridean island of Iona perched off the western end of Mull has always impressed me as somewhere that may attract some rare birds. Interestingly, it is very similar in size and shape to Fair Isle and both lie roughly on a NNE–SSW axis. As rarities go however that's where the similarities end! So far, the true potential of Iona hasn't been met although occasional scarce species such as Rose-coloured Starling, Yellow-browed Warbler and Common Rosefinch have been noted. A good number of day-trip birdwatchers visit the island, particularly in spring and summer, with 'relatively easy' Corncrakes often being the main target. However, there is little evidence of birders being based there for longer during migration times. With many gardens giving excellent cover as well as small groups of sheltered mature deciduous woodland the island has a good feel about it and regular autumn visits could be very interesting.

When news broke of a Great Spotted Cuckoo being seen briefly at the north end of the island on 23 June it was easy to envisage the area where it was, around some beautiful machair grassland, but harder to absorb the news. Fortunately, the finder, Rudolf Hummel, an Italian birdwatcher, had obtained a series of flight shots taken around mid-day during what he estimated as a six second sighting before the bird was lost from sight across some dunes. It wasn't until late that evening, when he was back on mainland Mull that he emailed out his photographs. Around two hours after Rudolf's sighting, the bird was independently reported by another birder, Philip Higginson, who managed some photographs to confirm his find and he later contacted Rare Bird Alert with his exciting news. Seeing Rudolf's email the next morning I alerted various folk including Mull resident tour guide birdwatcher Bryan Raines who lives nearby on the Ross of Mull in the hope that he could nip over and see it. I looked into plans to get over from mainland Argyll that day but soon realised the logistics made this impossible due to the Oban to Mull ferry being fully booked for cars and no buses across Mull to match the time required to meet the small ferry over to Iona - all a bit frustrating.

News got out later that day that Bryan had seen the bird and it was frequenting an area of machair just NW of the hostel at Lagandorain at the north end of Iona. I set off early on 25 June, and eventually got onto Iona at the first opportunity which was just after 10:00 hrs. A 2-km walk to the site took about 25 minutes at a fast pace….and then another five seconds to locate the bird. A quick scan and it was visible on the grassland

about 200 m away for about two minutes before if flew off and out of sight! I decided to just sit and wait at a good vantage point and after about 30 minutes a distant group of Starlings were seen harassing the bird in flight. Fortunately, it flew closer and eventually landed on a fence about 100 m away and then resumed feeding in the machair among buttercups and daisies and was a joy to watch. It was feeding on small caterpillars which John Nadin, who managed over the following day with a small group, said were of the Belted Beauty Moth, a scarce species usually found in coastal machair.

After taking numerous photos and some video at down to about 70 m over the next couple of hours, I decided to head back for the ferry. The bird at this stage had taken shelter remaining in some willow scrub, which it had also done earlier, and this was a behaviour that was also repeated and noted by John.

Only superficially similar to a Cuckoo this bird appeared to be a shade larger and with a different shape/jizz and almost Magpie-like. In flight the wings appeared blunter and less pointed and the tail appeared to be longer and very thin. A distinctive combination of white underparts (with a sulphur tinge on throat) and dark brown upperparts with numerous white spots made identification easy. The head and ear-coverts were silvery grey, appearing darker in flight and at a distance and the bill was short, dark, decurved and had a dark eye. The legs were longer than Cuckoo and white 'trousers' seen well as it hopped along the ground with head turning side to side looking for caterpillars.

Originally reported as being an 'immature' by Rudolf Hummel rather than a juvenile with rufous primaries, I expected to see more evidence of immature or second-calendar-year (2cy) features. What really stood out on good views was the silver-grey head along with an apparent short crest more indicative of an adult bird. No obvious rufous tinged primaries could be seen on the closed wing indicative of some 2cy individuals and on checking flight shots again this was not evident. As such the bird appeared to be in an adult-type plumage although hesitant to be definite at this stage as second-year birds are quite variable in plumage.

Plate 233 a–d. Great Spotted Cuckoo, Iona, Argyll, June 2019. © *Rudolf Hummel*

Plate 234. Great Spotted Cuckoo, Iona, Argyll, June 2019. © *Jim Dickson*

When I was reading up on 2cy plumage, Lansdown (1995) notes "although juveniles and adults are quite distinct ageing an individual Great Spotted Cuckoo is, however, not straightforward, owing to the species' variable first-year plumage. A first-year is, to a varying degree, intermediate in appearance between a juvenile and an adult, and the degree is dependent upon the timing of the post-juvenile moult. To age a Great Spotted Cuckoo as a first-year, it is necessary to note the presence of both non-juvenile and non-adult characters". Also, an excellent series of photographs appear in (Blasco-Zumeta & Heinze 2019) showing the variability of 2cy birds. As such, this individual appeared a good match for an adult bird and also showed quite extensive wear on the primary tips with the white tips having completely worn off making it quite a distinctive individual.

A search through past records data on Birdguides showed this to be the fourth Great Spotted Cuckoo report in Great Britain & Ireland in 2019 with other records from Cork (un-aged) on 15 February, the Isle of Wight (adult) on 21 March to 18 April and Norfolk (2cy) on 30 April to 14 May. This equals the peak of four sightings in a year, also achieved in 1990, 2009 and 2014.

Of the 66 records up to the end of 2018, most have been in Cornwall (10) and Norfolk (9). March and April are the peak months for sightings, and spring records are mostly of second-year birds whereas autumn birds tend to involve juveniles. The Iona bird appears to be the first report from Great Britain and Ireland in June. The previous record from Scotland was of a juvenile (or perhaps 2cy bird) at Rendall on Mainland Orkney on 14–30 August 1959. The closest records to Scotland since then have been single birds in Northern Ireland, Northumberland and from the Isle of Man. The British records are all from coastal counties from Northumberland round to Cheshire, with most from Yorkshire to the Isles of Scilly and Pembrokeshire.

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Scottish Bird Sightings

1 April to 30 June 2019

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The species order is that of the IOC World Birdlist as adopted by BOU on 1 January 2018.

An outstanding few months brought good numbers of rarer herons, Cranes, warblers and Rose-coloured Starlings, while a Baikal Teal (potential Scottish first), a Great Spotted Cuckoo and a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (both second for Scotland) in June were top drawer highlights in what is often a quiet month.

Cackling Goose (*hutchinsii*): one was still at Kyles Paible, North Uist (OH) to 2 April, and a new bird was at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist also on 2 April. **Taiga Bean Goose:** there was one at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 13 April, and one at Scoughall (Loth) on 19 May. **Tundra Bean Goose:** one was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 6–15 April, and one at Portmoak Moss, near Loch Leven (P&K) on 6–19 April. **Bewick's Swan:** one was at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 16–17 April. **Egyptian Goose:** one was at Letham Pools, Collessie (Fife) on 6 April, and two at Blairbowie, near Maybole (Ayrs) on 10–11 April. **Ruddy Shelduck:** one was at Udale RSPB Reserve (High) on 9–29 May, at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 11 June, at Loch Leven RSPB Reserve (P&K) on 22nd–25th, at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 28th, and at Tyninghame (Loth) on 29th.

Baikal Teal: in a brief foray out of NE England, a drake was at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 2 June - a potential first for Scotland. **Garganey:** in a good spring for this species one was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 7 April,

Plate 235. Garganey, Caerlaverock WWT, Dumfries & Galloway, April 2019. © *Brian D. Henderson*

two at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 8–19 April, with one seen to 23rd; a drake at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 13th; three on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15–20th; two at Loch of Benston, Mainland (Shet) on 19th; one at Balmore Pool, Milngavie (Clyde) on 20–21st; two at Loch Leven RSPB Reserve (P&K) on 20th; one at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 21–28th; two at Irvine (Ayrs) on 24–25th; one at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 25th; one at Boddam (NES) on 25th; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 26th, with two there on 27th; two at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 26th, and one on 30th; one at Broadford, Isle of Skye (High) on 27th; one at Loch na Reivil, North Uist (OH) on 27–28th; one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 27–29th; one at Frobost, South Uist (OH) on 27th; two on North Ronaldsay on 28–29th; one at Balnakeil (High) on 28th; one at Loch Loy, near Nairn (M&N) on 29th, and three at Loch of Hillwell on 30 April. **Blue-winged Teal:** the drake was still at Mellon Charles, near Aultbea (High) from March to 4 June with other drakes then seen at Douglas Water (Clyde) on 12–24 June, and Frankfield Loch, Glasgow (Clyde) from 15 June into July. **American Wigeon:** single drakes were still at Loch an Sticir, North Uist (OH) to 1 April, and still at Loch Watten (Caith) to 3 April. **Black Duck:** the regular drake was present at Strontian (High) from March into July. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were still at North Ronaldsay (Ork) from March to 10 April; at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) and at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) to 5 April; with other drakes at Tain (High) on 8 April; near Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 15 April; at Davan Loch (NES) on 16th; near Skaill/Yesnaby, Mainland (Ork) on 19 April to 1 May; near Northdale, Unst (Shet) on 11–13 May; at Haroldswick, Unst on 24 May to 5 June, and at Baltasound, Unst on 22 June.

Ring-necked Duck: single drakes were again on Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) on 1–24 April; at Loch of Skene (NES) on 12 April; a female at St. John's Loch (Caith) on 13–25 April; two birds at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree (Arg) on 20 April to 2 May; a drake at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) 27–28 April; at Loch nan Eala, Arisaig (High) on 17–18 May, and at Loch na Reivil, North Uist (OH) on 10–14 June. **Lesser Scaup**: single drakes were at Bea Loch, Sanday (Ork) on 11–21 April, and at Millar's Moss Reservoir, near St Abbs (Bord) from 18 May into July. **King Eider:** a drake was still at Nairn (M&N) from March into July, and one at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 4 May to 17 June. **Surf Scoter:** a drake was still off Musselburgh/Fisherrow (Loth) from March, with a female also off there on 4–22 April, up to two drakes and two females from 23 April to 17 May. Elsewhere, a drake was off Gullane Point (Loth) on 21 April; three drakes and a female were in the

Plate 236. Surf Scoter, Musselburgh Lagoons, Lothian, April 2019. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Sound of Taransay, off Harris (OH) on 1 May; one flew south past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 17 June; two drakes were off Dunnet Head (Caith) on 17–21 June, and two drakes off Embo (High) on 29 June. **White-winged Scoter:** the returning drake was off Musselburgh (Loth) from 8 April to 20 May. **Smew:** single redheads were still at Lochore Meadows CP (Fife) from March to 10 April; at Cameron Reservoir (Fife) on 7 April; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 10th; at Vatshoull Loch, Whalsay (Shet) on 12th, and at Loch of Skene (NES) on 13 April.

White-billed Diver: three were off Cullen (M&N) on 2 April, with two still on 9–13 April, four on 14th, three on 16th, one still on 19–21st, two on 23–25th, and one on 27 April; two off Portsoy (NES) on 2 April, six on 11th, three on 17th, two on 18th, one on 19–20th, four on 21st, at least nine on 22nd, two on 23–26th, one on 27–28th, nine on 29th, two on 30 April, and singles on 8th & 14 May; two off Burghead (M&N) on 11th, with one on 12–15th, four on 16th, one on 20–21st, three on 26th, two on 27th, and one on 28 April to 1 May; two off Lossiemouth Harbour on 14th; two off Hopeman (M&N) on 19th; one off the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 20 April; one off Portknockie (M&N) on 26 April; two off Papa Westray (Ork) on 28 April, four on 1 May, and one on 14 May; one off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 April to 1 May, and one flew past on 19 May; one off Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 6 May; one flew north past Longhaven, near Boddam (NES) on 27 May, and one flew south past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 17 June. **Pied-billed Grebe:** the returning bird was still at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) from March to 7 April, and the male was again at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) from March into July. **Black-necked Grebe:** an overwintering bird was still off Elie Ness (Fife) from March to 14 May.

Black Stork: one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 4–7th and 19 June; presumed same at Finhorn Bay (M&N) on 9–10 June; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 14 June and at Bonar Bridge (High) on 15 June. **Spoonbill:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 2–7th and 15–22 April, with two on 12–13 April, one again from 6–27 May, with two on 11 May, seven on 3 June, five on 6 June and three on 8th, and one still on 25 June; one nearby on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 11th and 17 April and 2 June, with seven there on 7 June, five on 8th, three on 9th, six on 14th and one still into July; one at Loch Leven RSPB Reserve (P&K) on 14 April; one at Loch of Wester (Caith) on 1–2 May; one at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 8 May; one flew NW over Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 12 May; one at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 30 May to 25 June; five flew north past St Abb's Head (Bord) and west past Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 2 June; one was at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 10 June; five at Tyninghame Inner Bay (Loth) on 22 June into July; and one at Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 28 June. **American Bittern:** one was at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 10–12 May. **Little Bittern:** one was at Ham Burn, Foula (Shet) on 2–5 June. **Purple Heron:** an adult was at Bolnabodach, Barra (OH) on 16 May to 10 June. **Great White Egret:** one was still at Coldstream (Bord) to 23 April; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 1–18 April and 2 May, with two there on 15 May, and one still on 7th & 24 June; at Loch Doon (Ayrs) on 16–19 April, and one at Graemeshall, Mainland (Ork) on 12 May. **Little Egret:** few reports from the strongholds in Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway, but unusual records involve at least one touring north Shetland from 16 May into July.

Montagu's/Pallid Harrier: a 1st-summer female was near Gloup, Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 9 June. **Black Kite:** singles were on Fair Isle on 19 April; at Orphir, Mainland (Ork) on 20 April; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 20th; at Cunningsburgh, Mainland (Shet) and Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 22nd; at East Burrafirth, Unst on 24th, and on Fair Isle on 28 April to 1 May. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was still on Mainland Orkney, with sightings at Birsay Moors RSPB Reserve on 5th and 20 April, and at Dounby, Mainland (Ork) on 24 April. It, or another, was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 13 May, and one was at Findhorn Bridge (High) on 24 May. **Spotted Crake:** three singing males were at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 28 May, with two still audible to 2 June, and one was singing on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 June. **Crane:** in April at least four were in NE Scotland (4–27th), mostly at Loch of Strathbeg/Ythan Estuary; at least one on Orkney (8–19th); one again at Coldstream (Bord) on 21st; at least two on Shetland (22–24th) and four at the Culbin Bar, near Nairn (M&N) on 29 April. In May, there were at least eight in NE Scotland (1st–31st); at least one on Orkney (6–27th); at least four on Shetland (8–21st) and at least two on the Outer Hebrides (11th). In June, there were still at least two on Shetland 3–12th); one at Hatton (NES) on 4th; at least one on Orkney (6–16th), and one at Scoughall (Loth) on 17th.

Stone-curlew: one was at Virkie/Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 17 May, and one near Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 25 June. **Black-winged Stilt:** one was at Heylipol, Tiree on 16–18 April - the first for Argyll. **Avocet:**

one was at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 9–25 April; two at Tentsmuir Point (Fife) on 17 April; four flew past Tronach Head (M&N) on 20th; five were at the Spey Estuary (M&N) on 20th; three at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 21st; two near Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 27 April to 1 May; two at Kingsbarns (Fife) on 28 April, and one Loch Bee/Clachan Pools, South Uist on 18 June. **Pacific Golden Plover:** one was near Cott, Papa Westray (Ork) on 17 June. **American Golden Plover:** one was at Loch Ordais, Lewis (OH) on 4 June. **Great Knot:** an adult was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 30 May to 4 June. **Broad-billed Sandpiper:** one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 30 May. **Temminck's Stint:** one was at Angle Park GP, near Collessie (Fife) on 13 May; two at Longhaven (NES) on 26 May; two at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 27th; three at the Ugie Estuary, Peterhead (NES) on 28th; one at High Valleyfield (Fife) on 30–31st, and one at Westing, Unst (Shet) on 31 May. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 1 June. **Terek Sandpiper:** one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 13 June, and one at Dornoch Point (High) on 28–30 June. **Grey Phalarope:** one flew past Uisead Point, Machrihanish (Arg) on 26 May, and one past Maidens (Ayrs) on 26 May. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was at Skateraw (Loth) on 4–7 May. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was on Fair Isle on 18–19 May and at Gards Loch, Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 23–29 May and again on 19–20 June. **Greater Yellowlegs:** one was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 28 April.

Sabine's Gull: a 1st-summer was between Colonsay and Garvellachs (Arg) on 27 April, and an adult seen from the Lochmaddy–Uig ferry (OH/High) on 17 June. **Ross's Gull:** a late report was of an adult at Cairnbulg (NES) on 31 March. **Franklin's Gull:** an adult was on Fair Isle on 6th June. **Mediterranean Gull:** few reported away from the Firth of Forth, but a 1st-summer was at Peninerine, South Uist (OH) on 1 June, and at Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 3 June, and two 2nd-summer birds were at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 18 June. **Ring-billed Gull:** an adult was at Glen Turret, near Crieff (P&K) on 18 June. **Glaucous Gull:** over 25 in January, from Caithness to Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway, all singles. In May about 12 were noted, from Shetland to Lothian and Argyll, all singles. At least seven in June, from Shetland to Lothian and the Outer Hebrides, all singles. **Iceland Gull:** over 20 present in April from Shetland to Angus and Dumfries & Galloway, mostly singles but with

Plate 237. Great Knot, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, June 2019. © *Andy Williams*

two at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 2nd, at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) and Thurso (Caith) on 23rd. About 14 in May, from Shetland to Moray & Nairn and Argyll, all singles except for two at Sandness, Mainland (Shet) on 18th. About 10 still in June from Shetland to Fife and the Outer Hebrides, all singles. **Kumlien's Gull:** an adult was at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 5 June, and a 3rd-winter on 6 June. **Yellow-legged Gull:** a 3rd-summer was on Foula (Shet) on 26 May to 5 June.

Gull-billed Tern: one was at Loch a' Phuill/Loch Riaghain, Tiree (Arg) on 17–27 May; one at Lower Palace, Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 23 June; one at Kindallachan, near Dunkeld (P&K) on 25 June, and one at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 29 June then at Ringasta/Hillwell/Loch of Spiggie/Toab, Mainland (Shet) on 30 June into July. **Black Tern:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 June; at Tugnet/River Spey (M&N) on 6 June; at Craigmill Burn, Carnoustie (A&D) on 14 June, and at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 25 June. **Pomarine Skua:** very poor numbers seen: one flew past Tarbat Ness (High) on 15 April; four were at Sinclair's Bay (Caith) on 16 April; eight off Saltcoats (Ayrs) on 28th, and one off Nairn (M&N) on 30 April. At least 77 were noted in May, from Dumfries & Galloway to Shetland, and in the North Sea off Highland and Moray & Nairn, with peak counts of 23 off Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 19th, five off Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 10th, and five off Newbie (D&G) on 23rd. One flew past Southerness Point (D&G) on 3 June. **Long-tailed Skua:** generally very poor numbers seen: one was off Seafield (D&G) on 28 April, while in May over 285 were noted, most on the Outer Hebrides, particularly Aird an Runair, North Uist with 15 there on 19th and 250 on 26th, with next highest count of six over Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 26th, otherwise two noted in Ayrshire and three on Orkney. Six flew past Aird an Runair, North Uist on 3 June, and one past Scrabster (Caith) on 26 June.

Turtle Dove: singles were near Corsock (D&G) on 20 May; at Barvas, Lewis (OH) on 24–25 May; at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 2 June; on Fair Isle on 3 June; at Aithness, Fetlar (Shet) on 7th; at Salen, Mull (Arg) on 8th; near Loch an Eilein, Tiree (Arg) on 8–10th, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–24 June. **Mourning Dove:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 April - first for Orkney (5th Scottish). **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** one was near Lagandorain, Iona (Arg) on 23–29 June - the second Scottish record. **Scops Owl:** one was found dead on Bressay (Shet) on 10 June. **Snowy Owl:** the male was still on Eday (Ork) from March to 2 April, a female near Inverkirkaig (High) on 13 April; a female again on St Kilda (OH) on 4 May into July; one near Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 4 May, and a male at Mid Tooin, near Cottascarth, Mainland (Ork) on 14 May. **Tengmalm's Owl:** one was again at Lea Gardens, Tresta, Mainland (Shet) from 10–13 April, with presumed same at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 14 April.

Nightjar: one was at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 2 June, and one at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 23 June. **Alpine Swift:** one flew past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 7 June, and one was over Burwick, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8 June. **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater:** one was at Achnahaird (High) on 23 June - second Scottish record. **Bee-eater:** two were at Blaven Car Park, Skye (High) on 21 April; one at Deerness (High) on 25 May, and one at Latheronwheel (Caith) on 11–14 June. **Hoopoe:** singles were at Nethybridge (High) on 14 April; at Boarhills (Fife) on 17 April; on the Isle of May on 18th; on Fair Isle on 23 April to 1 May; at Kinloch Hourn (High) on 28 April; on West Burra (Shet) on 4–8 May; at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 10–11 May; at St. Cyrus (NES) on 12 May; near Dunoon (Arg) on 13 May, and at Shawbost, Lewis (OH) on 15 May. **Wryneck:** singles were at Hopes Reservoir (Loth) on 20 April; at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 25 April; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 26th; at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 26–29th; at Barns Ness (Loth) on 26–27th; at Maywick, Mainland (Shet) on 28th; on Fair Isle on 28–29 April & 1st and 15 May; on Sanday (Ork) on 30 April to 2 May; at Feal Burn, Fetlar (Shet) on 14 May, and on Out Skerries on 21–22 May. **Hobby:** one was on Mull (Arg) on 10 April; then in June at least 12 were noted on Shetland, and elsewhere singles were on Fair Isle on 3rd & 15 June; at Callander (UF) on 3rd; at Inchgarth Reservoir (NES) on 4th; at Milton, Tiree (Arg) on 6th; at Grasspoint, near Salen, Mull (Arg) on 8th; at Alyth (P&K) on 19th; at Lochhouses (Loth) on 20th; at Lyth, near Wick (Caith) on 26th; at Clettraval, North Uist (OH) on 29th, and at Cruden Bay (NES) and Tyninghame (Loth) on 30 June.

Red-backed Shrike: noted from 19 May, with up to ten on Shetland, two on Fair Isle, and singles at Balephuil, Tiree (Arg) on 21st and at Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 24th during the month. Birds were noted to 18 June with up to seven on Shetland, two on Fair Isle, and two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th, and one on 12th; two at Boddam (NES) on 6th; two at Rattray Head (NES) on 6th; and singles on the Isle of May on 6th; on Westray (Ork) on 8th; at Inverbervie (NES) on 9th, and Papa Westray (Ork) on 17–18 June. **Great Grey Shrike:** singles were at Tomatin (High) on 8 April; on Fair Isle on 9–11 April, and at Northdale, Unst (Shet) on 18 April. **Woodchat Shrike:** one was at

Hatston, Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 17–19 May. **Golden Oriole:** a female/1st-summer male was at Easter Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 16–17 May; one at Sandness, Mainland (Shet) on 18 May; one at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 20–24th; one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 21st, one at Breibhig, Barra (OH) on 21st, and one at Crinan (Arg) on 30 May. **Waxwing:** over 130 were noted in April, with high counts of 25 at Tomatin (High) on 3rd, 20+ in Warriston, Edinburgh (Loth) on 8th, and 24 at Findhorn Bridge (High) on 16th. In May singles were at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 3–5th; in Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 5–7th; at Aithness, Fetlar (Shet) on 22nd; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 23rd; at Norwick, Unst on 24th; at Haroldswick, Unst on 25th, and Brae, Mainland (Shet) on 26–27th. In June one was reported on Eriskay (OH) on 12th, and three at Scatsta, Mainland (Shet) on 28th. **Shorelark:** two on Fair Isle on 6–9 April, with a single there on 2 May; singles on Noss (Shet) on 6th and 22 May; one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 6 May; two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8 May, and one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 15 May. **Short-toed Lark:** one was on Noss (Shet) on 27–28 April, and one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 29 May to 3 June. **Calandra Lark:** one was at Paible, North Uist (OH) on 3 June - second for the Outer Hebrides. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 20 May, and one on Fair Isle on 21 May.

Iberian Chiffchaff: a male was singing at Mill of Tarty, near Newburgh (NES) from 12–25 May; one at Balnakeil, near Durness (High) from 17–19 May, and one at Langass Lodge, North Uist (OH) on 30 May. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at Isbister, Mainland (Shet) on 23 May. **Paddyfield Warbler:** one was on Housay, Out Skerries (Shet) on 22 May. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 23 May; two on Foula (Shet) on 29 May; and singles at Gartocharn (Clyde) on 4 June; on Fair Isle on 5 June; at Collieston (NES) on 6th; at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 21st, and at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) from 23 June into July. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 20 May; at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 23 May; at Norwick, Unst (Shet), on Foula (Shet) and on the Isle of May on 5 June; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7 June; at Halligarth, Unst on 9th; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 9–11th; at Baltasound, Unst on 11th; at Haroldswick, Unst on 11–19th; at Norwick, Unst on 20th, and at Baltasound on 30 June. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 16–20 June. **Melodious Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 4 June. **Icterine Warbler:** noted from 18 May, with at least ten on Shetland during the month, and singles were on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20 May. In June singles were at Quendale Mill, Mainland (Shet) on 1st; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 5–7th; on the Isle of May on 5–8th; on Fair Isle on 8th and 12th, and at Gorie, Bressay (Shet) on 14 June. **River Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 16–18 June. **Savi's Warbler:** one was at Longhaven, near Boddam (NES) on 23 April and 6 May, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 May. **Subalpine Warbler:** one was near Point of Guide, West Burra (Shet) on 16 May. Birds assigned to the **Eastern subspecies** group were on Noss (Shet) on 17–19 May; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 17–27 May, with two there on 24th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17–21st; at Scousburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 20 May; on Papa Westray (Ork) on 8 June, and on Fair Isle on 8–11 June and 19 June. **Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler:** a female was at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 28 April. **Sardinian Warbler:** a male was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 1–4 June. **Firecrest:** one was at Collieston (NES) on 30 April, and a singing male at Bakkasetter, Mainland (Shet) on 15 May.

Rose-coloured Starling: in June singles were at North Berwick (Loth) on 2nd; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3rd; at Irvine (Ayrs) on 3rd; at Drumoak (NES) on 3–6th; at Blackwaterfoot, Isle of Arran (Ayrs) on 4th; near Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 6th; at Carinish, North Uist (OH) on 11–17th; at Kilmarnock (Ayrs) on 11th; at Castletown (Caith) on 15–16th; at Barnton, Edinburgh (Loth) on 17–21st; at Esknish, Islay (Arg) on 17th; at Taberonochy, Isle of Luing (Arg) on c18–24th; at Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 19th; at Portree, Skye (High) on 22nd; at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist on 23rd; at Durness (High) on 24–25th; at Sumburgh/Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 26–30th, and on the Isle of Grimsay (OH) on 30 June. **Bluethroat:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 April, with a month until the next - two on Out Skerries (Shet) and three on the Isle of May on 17 May. Forty-five birds were logged on 18 May and about 90 birds were recorded to 30 May, with high counts of 12 on Out Skerries on 20th, 16 on Fair Isle on 18th, and 12 on the Isle of May on 18–19th. **Thrush Nightingale:** singles were on Noss (Shet) on 20 May; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 21–23 May; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 21–22 May, and on Fair Isle on 24–26 May, and on 4–5 June. **Nightingale:** one was on Fair Isle on 28 April; one at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 15 May, and one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 11 June. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** a female/1st-winter male was at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 12 April, and a female on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24 May. **Collared Flycatcher:** a female was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12 May;

Plate 238. Bluethroat, Isle of May, Fife, May 2019. © *John Nadin*

a male on Papa Westray (Ork) on 18 May; a male on Stronsay (Ork) on 18th, and a male on Out Skerries (Shet) on 19 May. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** a female was on the Isle of May on 16 May; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 17 May, and a male at North Locheynort, South Uist (OH) on 10 June. **'Black-bellied Dipper':** one was on Fair Isle on 4–9 April.

Yellow Wagtail: one was at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 6 April; three at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 20 April; singles at St. Combs (NES) on 22 April, and Girdle Ness (NES) and Mains of Usan (A&D) on 26 April; **Blue-headed** form *flava*: one was at Collessie (Fife) on 16 April; at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 18 April; two at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 20th; two at Skateraw (Loth) on 27 April; singles on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 May; at Durness (High) and Balnakeil (High) on 2 May; at Munnoch Reservoir (Ayrs) on 12 May; on Fair Isle on 14–19th, and at Balnakeil on 17th, with three there on 19 May. **'Channel Wagtail'** - one showing characteristics of this hybrid (*flavissima x flava*) was at Skateraw on 26 April. **Grey-headed** form *thunbergi*: singles were at Skateraw (Loth) on 18–19 April and 2 May; at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 10 May; on Fair Isle on 15–16th & 25–26 May; at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 17 May; on Noss (Shet) on 18th; two on Out Skerries (Shet) on 19–20th & 26 May, with one there on 6 June. **Black-headed** form *feldegg*: singles were at Trumpan, Skye (High) on 26 April, and Durness (High) and Balnakeil (High) on 4 May. **Citrine Wagtail:** a male was on Fair Isle on 14–15 May and another there on 27–28 June. **Tawny Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 26–27 May. **Water Pipit:** singles were at Dumbarton (Clyde) from March to 7 April; at Skateraw (Loth) from March to 7 April; at Wine Bay, Great Cumbrae (Clyde Islands) on 6–7 April; at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 7–18 April, and at Seamill (Ayrs) on 9 April.

Hawfinch: up to 38 were on Shetland, four on Fair Isle and up to nine on Orkney in April, elsewhere singles were at Balemore, North Uist (OH) on 4–5th & 8th, and at Paiblesgarry, North Uist on 7th; at Bonar Bridge (High) on 7–8th; at Tongue (High), at Morar (High) and at Bellochantuy (Arg) on 19th; Castletown (Caith) on 22nd and at Grantown-on-Spey (High) on 28 April. In May there were two on Shetland, one on Fair Isle and at least four on the Outer Hebrides, and in June there were singles on Fair Isle on 8th; at Northbay, Barra (OH) on 12th and Gleann, Barra on 13th, and at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (Loth) on 18th. **Common Rosefinch:** there were singles at Baltasound, Unst (Shet)

Plate 239. Rustic Bunting, Burrafirth, Unst, Shetland, June 2019. © *David Cooper*

on 8–11 April, at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 10 April. In May there were up to 40 on Shetland, about seven on Fair Isle and two on Orkney, and in June there were three on Shetland, four on Fair Isle, and singles at Noss Head (High) on 2nd; on Papa Westray (Ork) on 4th; at Loch Sgoltaire, Colonsay (Arg) on 13th, and Aird Mhor, Barra (OH) on 23 June. **Serin:** one was at Brough, Whalsay (Shet) on 26–27 April, and one at Nasg, Barra (OH) on 29–30 April.

Lapland Bunting: the male was still at Sandar, North Ronaldsay (Ork) to 8 April; singles were at Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 12 April; at Inner Skaw, Unst (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 28th, and one flew over Cairngorm (High) on 29 April, with four at Loch Ba, Mull (Arg) on 28 May and one on Fair Isle on 30 May. **Snow Bunting:** at least 30 were noted in April, with higher counts of 17 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) 7–11th; six in Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 1st, and five on Fair Isle on 15–18th. There were eight in May, with singles at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 5th; at Labost, Lewis (OH) on 6th; two on Fair Isle on 16th, with one still to 20th; on Noss (Shet) on 24th; at Tiumpan, Lewis on 27th, with three on 27th, and one still on 28 May. **Ortolan Bunting:** one was on Fair Isle on 15 May. **Little Bunting:** singles were on Fair Isle on 23 April; at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 6–10 May, and at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 21 May. **Rustic Bunting:** a male was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 18–24 May; with singles at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 18–19 May; at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 20th; on Fair Isle on 21–23rd; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 23 May; at Skaw, Unst on 1st and 6 June, and at Burrafirth, Unst on 5 June. **Black-headed Bunting:** a male was at Strathwhillan, Isle of Arran (Ayrs) on 6 June; a male at Gigalum, Isle of Gigha (Arg) on 8th; a male at Noness, Mainland (Shet) on 19 June and one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 22–23 June. **White-crowned Sparrow:** one was at The Oa, Islay (Arg) on 12 June.

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Plates 240–244. These days, my work takes me all round the north-east of Scotland and on 26 April 2019, I was working in Banff. When duties were completed, I visited Troup Head for an hour and enjoyed watching the early season Gannet activity with a Short-eared Owl being a bonus. With an evening work appointment in Aberdeen to attend, I reckoned I'd squeeze in a brief visit to the Loch of Strathbeg since I was passing and a visit usually gleans something of interest.

On arrival, Hywel Maggs the reserve manager, came over to tell me about a House Martin x Swallow hybrid that had been flying about the reserve buildings and asked if I could take some photos if I managed to see it. Fortunately, the bird duly obliged allowing good views of it perched on wires and occasionally flying around the buildings.

My first impression was that it was a bird of two halves. This may be over simplification but the front was Swallow-like and the rear was House Martin, complete with white rump! Available literature seems to indicate this hybridisation is not overly rare but I wonder how many similar birds get overlooked?

Equipment used: Canon 7D mk2, Canon 100–400 mm mk2 lens, manual, ISO 640, 1/3200 sec, f8.0.

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